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ESSAYS

AT HOME AND ELSEWHERE



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# ESSAYS

AT HOME AND ELSEWHERE

BY

E. S. NADAL

London

MACMILLAN AND CO.

1882

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## NOTE.

SOME of these papers were written in the United States ; others were written abroad. One was published in an English Magazine. This will account for the use of such expressions as " this country," " here," " there," etc., with different significations.



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## I.

### THE OLD BOSTON ROAD.

**I**T was about five o'clock on a morning late in July that I started on horseback to ride to town, from a village about twenty miles from New York, on the old Boston road. It was the cool morning of what I knew would be a hot day. The dews of the midsummer night had laid the dust of the roads. The time was gone for roses, and few flowers were to be seen in the gardens as I passed along. The blinds of the houses were shut, the inmates not being awake yet. One of the agreeable peculiarities of horseback riding is that in this way of getting about one learns the

points of the compass, and obtains some notion of the geographical relation to each other of the various regions traversed. We know that, if we walk along a certain road or pavement, it will take us to a place one, two, three, perhaps four miles away. But to reach a point thirty miles off, there is but a single method known to the experience. This is to buy a ticket and take a seat in the railway car. The ticket is punched a few times, and the traveller arrives at his destination, all the while having had no more notion of north, south, east, or west than a sultana, who, sewn up in a bag, is shot from the wall of the seraglio into the Bosphorus. The traveller by railway only knows that he leaves one familiar spot, and in a little while finds himself at another. It gives him a novel sense of liberty and independence to discover that, by following a certain beautiful road, his horse will surely carry him the distance between the two

places. "A good man on a good horse is servant to no man," says the Portuguese proverb. He mounts when he likes, rides at dawn, noon, evening, or by moonlight, and no conductor calls the names of the villages as he passes.

The morning was so beautiful and the air so pleasant that I did not hurry. But presently the sun became too strong. It was after seven when I reached a hill-top which looked down upon a cluster of houses about a stream crossed by a bridge. Here I said I would rest for the hot hours of the day ; and I thought how pleasant it would be if I should find a pretty church, in which I might sit and look out of the window, and listen to a discourse punctuated by the monotonous stamping of the horses tied without to the palings.

I had in mind the rectangular, very white church with green blinds and a white steeple, which is to be seen everywhere in New England and in the adjacent

regions. It is, so far as I know, the one contribution which this country has made to public architecture. It belongs to and has well suited the New England landscape and history. Set in some high place, it is seen from all the lorn, round hill-tops of its native region ; its spire is the one white object in that drear and narrow landscape, lifted close into the chill and dun sky of the later summer. That edifice is most expressive of the piety and the virtuous poverty of its early builders, of the silent life of the successive societies which, scattered and concealed, their poor homes unmarked even by the smoke of their hearth-stones, have spread themselves throughout those melancholy hills. I like, too, the village steeples, with the ornaments in which the æsthetic feeling of the Puritans found humorous vent. Was there ever such utter extravagance of wire and gilt? Cupola succeeds cupola, and the cock succeeds the ball and arrow, and

there is always another ball, and always another arrow. I do not think it will be a good change for the New England landscape when these truthful monuments shall be replaced by stone structures which have no meaning or history.

Suddenly I looked to my right, and there rose, not a hundred yards away, what was perhaps the prettiest church I had ever seen in this country. It was an old black and red brick building, with a tower and an extremely pretty belfry, and stood in the midst of some acres of thickly studded tombstones. With an agreeable sense that the deserts of a man must be considerable who had come upon such a piece of good luck, I began to look for an inn. I was directed to a little place not very far off. It was a low whitish house close by the road-side with a narrow porch, and with no gate or fence before the door. The house had a shabby and sinister appearance. It might have been the scene

of a murder which should get into all the papers, and the fame of which should bring throngs of people to stare at it on Sunday afternoons. Though this was the impression which the outside of the house gave me, I have never found a better tavern. France cannot supply a better dinner nor England a pleasanter landlord than Odell's tavern. I discovered that the place had a history of its own. The oldest part of the house had been standing for more than a hundred and fifty years. In the days before railways it had been a great stopping-place for travellers. Two hundred horses had once been stabled where now my own horse champed his oats side by side with the solitary filly of the landlord. Dinner had been served there to many eminent persons, very much thought of in their day, but whose names are now scarcely known even to their descendants. The landlord told me that on a mantelpiece which stood in a part



of the house now torn down, there was the name of each of the Presidents of the United States, carved thereon with his own hand. But I should doubt the truth of this. John Quincy Adams would not have been likely to cut his name on a mantelpiece. The railway has since left the place some miles to one side. It is now known only to people who drive out from town.

The hall was rather wide and was covered with a well-worn oil-cloth. It contained a table set against the wall, on which there was a large brass dinner-bell. A small and very old black-and-tan trotted through the hall and sat about the porch. It was an extremely high-bred dog, the landlord informed me, and very old and shrivelled, so that his nose had receded from his teeth and was turned violently upward. I supposed he was snarling at me, until I saw that the little wits he had left were perfectly well dis-

posed to me. But during the whole morning, I could not quite reconcile the ominous and fixed grin of the little creature with the mild and feeble expression of his half-blind eyes. In company with this aged black-and-tan, I sat upon the porch for an hour or two, feeling the first heats of the day. The dust of the road before the door was not disturbed by the passing of a single waggon, and not a sound came from within the house. I read a history of Westchester County. This book contained a story of Washington which was new to me. During the time of the Revolution there lived in the neighbourhood in which this tavern stood, a Mr. Lyon, who was a blind man. Washington was once dining at the house of this gentleman, when Mr. Lyon said to him : "General, I am a blind man myself, but the ladies tell me that you are a very handsome man." Washington said : "Sir, I fear the ladies are as blind as yourself."



This appears to me to have been a rather rude remark on the part of the Father of his country.

I was at the church half an hour before the service began, and learned from the sexton or bell-ringer something about the history of it. It appeared that the building was more than a hundred years old. The church was used through the Revolutionary war by the British as a hospital, and served as a court-room during the years immediately following. Hung up in the vestry there was a subpœna signed with the name of Aaron Burr. The bell which still summons the people to church was the same which had been buried at the approach of the English troops. A prayer-book which had been in use since 1715, and which had also been hid during the Revolution, was shown me. The congregation was very much older than this building, a frame church having long stood upon the site opposite. This frame church

was broken up and burned for firewood by the British inside the brick church. A former rector and zealous benefactor of the church lay with his wife under the chancel of the frame edifice. The rector, who had devoted himself with great energy to the erection of this little brick cathedral, requested in his will that his body and that of his wife should be buried in it. He died, however, before its completion, his body was buried in the frame church, and his request was neglected, until some boys, in playing about the old site, came upon the good man's bones. The rector and his wife have now long been laid under the chancel of the church to the erection of which he devoted himself with such zeal, and looked forward with such hope and wonder.

The Sunday-school was held upstairs in a chapel attached to the back of the church. The room was small and by no means full. In one corner a young lady

taught two or three of the larger girls. I saw her several times during the day. She appeared to enter into pretty much every religious equation of the neighbourhood. She taught in the Sunday-school ; I saw her in the choir, and it was she whom, at the close of the service, I observed in consultation with the rector. The school had an unmistakable amateur and ineffective look. The boy who took up the collection had no basket, but used his felt hat instead. This he shook in a hopeless sort of way before each company of scholars ; his want of faith in the willingness or ability to pay of any one present must itself have had a paralysing effect upon the generosity of the company. He quickly took the hat to the superintendent ; the poor man dropped into it the one offering of the school, and blushing deeply as he looked at me, said to the scholars : " Well, you usually do better than that."

I was sitting in the church before the bells had begun to ring. But I soon heard behind me the rustling of dresses in the aisles. The rustling quickly became more frequent. The prayer-books were noisily let fall in their receptacles. As the various companies of village maids came up the aisles and sat in the pews, odours of heliotrope, anenome, lavender, and new-mown hay, began to diffuse themselves through the building. I was offered many prayer-books which I was unable to take. For how could I accept the book of the ladies on my left when I had already declined that of some ladies who sat just behind me? For the same reason I was compelled to decline the proffered volume of some very pretty girls who sat in the next pew to my right. In the pew just in front of me there were two little girls who were, I think, not more than ten years old. One of them, looking back, saw that I was without a book. There soon began a low whispered

conversation between them. One nudged her little friend and said: "You;" the other whispered: "No, *you*." At length one, barely looking round, held out a book in a very timid way, and this, of course, it was necessary that I should take.

The service over, the people stayed a considerable time under the trees by the church door, standing on the grass and cool stone walks, shaded from the hot summer weather without. It was long before the sociable assembly had finished their greetings. The carriages waited, drawn up before the door, while the people chatted. Indeed, it is by no means easy to get safely away from church one of those large families which take up two pews to themselves. Not to speak of the little girls in blue boots, there are three boys very near of a size, and the whole have to be marshalled by the two tall girls in white hats and red sashes. Young mammas, who had not met for a week,

perhaps a fortnight, stood by the gate and pecked each other with many inquiries and many expressions of delight.

Afterwards I walked back to the tavern, and dined at the landlord's own table, and he gave me such a dinner as I did not suppose an American tavern could supply. It was not a town dinner, of course ; but an appetite which the morning's ride and amusement had made eager was met by a sound and fresh repast. The dinner was from the landlord's own garden,—the lobster even, it was said, having been caught in the little bay which approached the foot of it. Later in the day I set out for New York, and, after an hour's riding, soon met barouches and phaetons containing people with town faces. I passed the Jerome racecourse, with its gilt and yellow gateway. I passed many road-houses, and met on my way caravans of rapid drivers, looking madly unhappy. I soon reached the well-kept woods of the Park,



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and saw before me, in the advancing sun-down, the roofs and towers of the town, the hewn fragments of rising cathedrals, and the scattered structures of the newer city. The sky beyond the bay and the town was of a cold and faint red. It was a scene of bronze which I now looked over, most unlike those quiet villages, unconscious of the nearness of a great city, which I had left but two hours before.



## II.

### ARTEMUS WARD.

I HAVE lately read the *Complete Works of Artemus Ward* edited by Mr. Hingston, who was, I believe, his business manager. Mr. Hingston wrote in this book some recollections of Artemus Ward; and he here and there added a footnote, in which he appears in a relation to the author somewhat like that which the middle-man has to the end-man at the minstrels—explaining the jokes in a superior and educated manner. But Mr. Hingston seems to have been a sincere admirer of Ward, and deserves the public gratitude for having got into a single



volume the effusions of this original writer, marked by so much wit and reflection, by such a friendly and gentle spirit, by a humour so thoughtful, yet so sudden and jocund. I have also found a book by Mr. Hingston, called *The Genial Showman*, which is in two volumes, and seemed at first to be a kind of life of Ward. But it contains very little about him. Of Ward's childhood there is scarcely anything; yet it would be interesting to learn something about his early days. The *Herald*, by the way, would do a public service by sending an interviewer who appreciates Artemus Ward to Waterford, Maine, to pick up all that may be learned about him from those of his neighbours who knew him. All that he has himself left is contained in "The Village Green," which is about Waterford. I have never been at Waterford myself, but I have looked it out on the map, and in particular have traced the course of a stream which runs through the township,

—Crooked River,—whose sad warbling through its poor landscape one can fancy at this distance.

Artemus Ward's New England origin is very plain in his writings. They represent the rural New England life well. They show the country store, the rude and austere village street, the solemn landscape, the humour, and the sense of the people. But they are even more American than Yankee. The *Complete Works of Artemus Ward* is a book which must be very grateful to the American who is living abroad. When he has been long enough away from home, there comes a time when he finds himself reading American newspapers a great deal; or, when reading the newspapers of the country, his eyes will wander away from a good anecdote, or a paragraph of gossip, or a fresh piece of really important European news, to read over several times a telegram from New York, stating

the arrival of so many tons of iron, or the embarkation of so many head of cattle. To any one in this state of mind, Artemus Ward's book will be welcome, for it will bring before him the scenery and society of his country.

The writings of Artemus Ward are most expressive of the society of the United States. His genius is very national. Such a character as Artemus Ward could not have existed in any other than a democratic community. The freedom with which he approaches everybody and everything would be possible only to an American, or to some member of society as democratic as ours. In what he has to say about the leading persons of the day, he does not at all take into account the fact that he is an obscure and uneducated youth; that he has never been at college; that he is only a reporter for a country paper; that he was yesterday a type-setter or a farmer's lad. No, he is an intellect, a

judgment, which has arrived at a certain degree of power,—by what means it matters not,—and which looks about it with that freedom from corporeal modifications which might belong to an immaterial intelligence. Ward's humour has many traits which are national. One of these is humility; he is the object of his own ridicule. Betsy Jane, his wife, scolds him, and sometimes pours hot water on him, and even beats him. But this self-ridicule is an old attribute of the joker. The fool in old times for every jest was threatened with three dozen, and the clown of the modern stage is being continually pommelled and knocked about. Again, Ward is always expressing the difficulty he finds in doing the things which romance-writers say are so easy to do. He says of a man who insulted him, that he, Ward, did not strike him, but that he "withered him with a glance of his eye." He says of another, whom he rebuked,

that he "qualed before his gase." Ward means, of course, that he ought to have "quailed," but that he did not. This is, again, an ancient and conventional mode of humour. After the famous tumbler, who is the serious attraction of the show, has turned a double-somersault or leaped over four horses, the clown makes a pretence of trying to do one of these feats, but either shirks it or sprawls upon all-fours. But, though humility is a historic feature of humour, I think that it particularly marks the humour of this country. It is to be seen in many American books of humour. Mark Twain has it. John Phoenix, whom Artemus Ward particularly admired, had much of it. We should expect to find it in a society where very few begin with silver spoons in their mouths; where each man has in some degree to contend with the hard and fundamental conditions of human existence and finds himself ungraceful and unsuccessful on comparing

himself with those vaunting heroes to whom fortune has given a long start.

In the circumstances of his life, and in his feelings, Ward was just like any other American young man of the people. He was a poor young man, and his books describe the life which a poor young man leads in America. This is done without the least false shame, and indeed without any consciousness that there is a class of society to whom such a life may seem vulgar. The pictures which he draws of that life are not vulgar, because they are true. He would have become vulgar had he professed to a standard of living which was not his own ; but this he did not do.

One sees in Ward that sympathy with both ends of society which characterises Americans of his education. He likes bar-keepers and stage-drivers, and does not feel himself to be a bit better than they. In return, they of course like him. The following story is vouched for by Mr.



Hingston as quite true. At Big Creek he delivered a lecture in the bar-room, standing behind the counter. The audience was pleased, and particularly the bar-keeper, who, when any good point was made, would deal the counter a vigorous blow with his fist, and would exclaim, "Good boy from the New England States! Bully for William W. Shakspeare!"

But if an aspiring and nice young American like Ward feels a friendly equality with stage-drivers, he has also a great respect for the genteel classes, and a desire to be genteel. Ward soon began to show this ambition strongly. He was at first a very uncouth and ugly youth. His ugliness was such a source of misery to him, that he used to lie awake at night thinking of it. From this experience he may perhaps have evolved his remark about the reporter of a rival paper in Cleveland, whom he charged with being so ugly that he was compelled to get up three times

every night to "rest his face." The negligence of his dress was at this time in accordance with the mean opinion which he had of his person. But when he began to find out that he was not so ill-looking as he had supposed, he soon showed a desire to obtain for himself the exterior of a member of the better classes.

Ward's sketches, though caricatures, are extremely lively representations of American society. He draws a society strongly marked by alert selfishness and good nature. He describes admirably the civility which is half kindness and half policy, the prudence, and the humbug of such a society. The Americans are a very civil people. I do not mean that they are merely civil in their way of speaking to one another; their civility is deeper than that: it is in the attitude of their minds toward one another. That civility may be selfish in its essence; it no doubt is. The silent teaching of American society causes each



man to respect his neighbour, because his neighbour possesses a respectable fraction of the general power. But, whatever may be the reason of the matter, there is no doubt of the fact that Americans are very friendly toward one another. Artemus Ward's pages show this quality. Ward really likes the people he laughs at. I believe he really admires the Latin of the Baldinsville schoolmaster, and ridicules his own ignorance quite as much as the schoolmaster's pedantry.

This American friendliness, of which I have been speaking, has its bad as well as its good side. Its bad side is its tolerance of that kind of vice, the motive of which is selfish advantage at the expense of public or private honour. Ward's satire, though mild and playful, was keen and accurate enough in its description of these traits of our society. At a war meeting in Baldinsville, which Artemus Ward had interrupted by one of the outbreaks of his

irresponsible humour, he was thus called to order by the editor of the *Baldinsville Bugle*, who presided: "I call the Napoleon of showmen, I call that Napoleonic man, whose life is adorned with so many noble virtues, and whose giant mind lights up this warlike scene,—I call him to order." Mr. Ward here remarks that the editor of the *Bugle* does his job printing. He is sufficiently keen in his exhibition of the disparity between big words and small motives. Thus, he says that he wants "editers" to come to his show "free as the flours of May." But he does object to their coming in crowds, and to their charging him ten cents a line for puffs, solely on the ground, alleged by them, that the press is the "Arkymedian Leaver which moves the world."

In his remarks upon social and political subjects, Artemus Ward shows that soundness of judgment and that cool and accurate perception of the actual state of

affairs which are the characteristics of our population. Artemus Ward evidently was not educated to a dislike of slavery. The black man is the object of his ridicule rather than of his pity. This may have been because it was easier to joke against negroes and abolitionists than against slaveholders. It is certain that, until within a very few years before the war, the American public hated nothing so much as an abolitionist. As it is only possible to make the crowd laugh on the side of their own opinions, the amusers of the public were compelled to cater to the anti-negro sentiment. The American stage of that period was certainly anti-negro. It is thus possible that Ward, being a joker, may have drifted into this manner of writing about slavery. But I rather think that his education and his disposition were not of the sort to incline him to take a strong part against slavery. One imagines him by disposition sceptical,

cautious, perhaps timid and despondent, more likely to fear the dangers of a bold movement than to feel an ardent and sanguine sympathy with its objects. I should think it likely, moreover, though Mr. Hingston has not informed us on this point, that Ward's father was an old-fashioned Democrat.<sup>1</sup> The men who voted for Jackson were most tenacious of their political sentiment, and rarely failed to communicate it to their children. This sentiment was of a virulent type. To many families in the land the mere name of Democrat had a charm which it required all the shock of revolution and civil war to dissipate. I should guess from the manner of Ward's mind towards the discussions which preceded the rebellion, that he had had a Democratic bringing up. But Ward was very loyal during

<sup>1</sup> I have since been informed that the father of Artemus Ward was a Jackson Democrat, and a member of the Maine Legislature.

the war, and did the Union good service. It is true that in his address on "The Crisis," delivered before "a c of upturned faces in the red skoolhouse" of Baldinsville, just previous to the outbreak of the war, he exhibits some of the immoral despair of that period. Likewise in his conversation with Prince Napoleon, the comicality of which but slightly veils the feeling of despondency, astonishment, and bitter disappointment which the madness of the quarrel had produced upon his reasonable and thoughtful mind, he said: "It cost Columbus twenty thousand dollars to fit out his explorin' expedition. If he had bin a sensible man, he'd hav put the money in a hoss railroad or a gas company, and left this magnificent continent to intelligent savages, who, when they got hold of a good thing, knew enuff to keep it. . . . Chris meant well, but he put his foot in it when he saled for America." But when the war has once begun, he is

in favour of it, and, indeed, raises a company. He resembles somewhat his own Squire Baxter. Squire Baxter, like President Buchanan, did not believe in coercion. But when he learned that the Flag had been assaulted, he changed his mind. Squire Baxter is a representative figure. Ward's writing will, I think, be useful to the future historian who wishes to form an exact idea of the physiognomy of public opinion at that time.

I have spoken of Ward as an uneducated youth, but, in truth, he had had a sort of education better than any college can give, and which no college can ensure ; it was his felicity that his past life had suited his talent. He had suffered from no self-mistrust or passion, or diversion of the mind to things unfriendly to its best powers. He had, indeed, had the best of educations,—that of a kind chance. That goddess, who scatters Jack-o'-lanterns along the path of the wayward, the



opinionated, and the eccentric, had conducted him in simplicity along the original path which nature had meant for him. It is rare to meet with so perfect a genius as that of Ward. Its perfection is not surprising, since his mind seemed to do but one thing. He had many fine qualities; he had wit, a sound judgment, a great deal of common sense, and he was full of keen feeling; but all these qualities were subject, or adjunct, to his talent of humorous perception and invention. His mental life seemed to consist in the practice of this talent. Everything that he says has the impression of it. It has been said that an author's matter is less important than his manner. By this is meant, I suppose, that the product is less important than the nature of the producing capacity,—that an apple or a bushel of apples is less important than the constitution of an apple-tree. Now no man ever had a more definite, certain, and, I might say,

perfect manner than Artemus Ward. It is true, also, that his mind was in general definite and perfect. He had a perfect sense of just what subjects would suit him. We see this in the case of his productions upon Salt Lake City, to which place he had for many years a desire to go. I suppose that he had never seen a Mormon, and it would be hard to say why he wished to go to Utah. But he had an instinct that this polygamous society, two thousand miles away; would be a good subject for him. The event showed that he was right; we know what a succession of novel and delightful absurdities he got out of the Mormons.

His mind, besides being definite and perfect, was retentive.<sup>1</sup> Some of his jokes seemed to have been engraved upon stone; he did not tire of things which had once

<sup>1</sup> It is said that the family of Artemus Ward are remarkable for their memories, so that the country people speak of a "Browne memory."



occupied him. On his way over the plains, he went to see some Indians, who were preparing themselves by feasting for going upon the war-path; he found them eating raw-dog, and they told him they did this in order to get up their courage. This greatly amused him. Long afterward, when he was lecturing in London, at that time in a decline and scarcely able to drag himself upon the platform, he would say: "Well, Hingston, haven't you a little raw-dog?" He was able to make his jokes last a long time. Perhaps no one got so much pleasure out of them as he did, and it was a law of his nature to be faithful to them. On his way from California overland, the thought struck him of announcing a lecture at the various telegraph stations along the route. He thought that his trouble would not be thrown away, since it was likely that the placards would be preserved as curiosities. Ac-

cordingly, at various stations throughout the wilderness, some of which were perhaps a hundred miles from a human habitation, he caused bills to be posted, containing these words : " A Lecture will be delivered here, in a sweet voice, by Artemus Ward, the Wild Humourist of the Plains."

Then also he had great confidence in his jokes. For instance, he said to some negro minstrels, with whom he spent an hour after one of his lectures in Philadelphia : " I had a new joke in my lecture to-night. If George Christy had known I was going to have it, he would have travelled a hundred miles to borrow it for his own. As it is, I have no doubt that he will have it telegraphed to him to-morrow." I scarcely know a greater instance of the confidence, I might almost say the impudence, of genius than his stopping, after referring, in his lecture upon the Mormons, to the death of young Mr. Kimball, to have some air of melan-

choly music, such as "Poor Mary Anne," played by the pianist. When I say that he had great confidence, I do not so much mean that he believed in himself. There is evidence that, like most other men of genius, he could be for the time cast down. Mr. Hingston, for instance, says that Artemus Ward once came to him in London, after he had had an interview with Mr. Lemon, looking unusually grave. He said: "Mr. Lemon tells me that I want discipline. I know I want discipline. I always did want it, and I always shall." Artemus Ward's confidence was not in himself but in his joke, as an external and substantial thing. Had you refused to laugh at one of his jokes, you would, no doubt, have thrown him for the moment into deep mortification, but he would have quickly recovered himself and would have said, like Galileo, "She still moves." His jokes, once invented, were tangible entities, quite outside of and separate from himself.

One may say that they were arranged in his mind on shelves, and that he would take them down as he required them. You sometimes find him writing a new paper for which he does not seem ready, as a landlady extemporises a lodging-house dinner. She remembers that there is somewhere a part of a ham, and there are some eggs and a half-pot of jam. So Ward, when compelled to write, reflects that here he can put in this joke, and that there he can use that one. It was thus he prepared the articles which he wrote in England. Whether because he was ill, or because he felt no encouragement to write in a strange country, the humour of Artemus Ward after he came to England seemed to languish, and he had recourse to some of his old jokes. Some of the things he wrote for *Punch*, however, were very good,—for instance, his admiring remarks upon the figure of Queen Elizabeth on horseback at the Tower. This work

greatly impressed the old showman. He speaks with special enthusiasm of the "fiery stuffed hoss, whose glass eye flashes with pride, and whose red morocker nostril dilates hawtily, as if conscious of the royal burden he bears."

In speaking of Ward's confidence in his jokes, I should not forget to mention that the confidence was due in part to the sweetness and the friendliness of his disposition. Was he not the friend of the world, and was not the world his friend? I think this one of his most important traits. He had no contempt or ill-temper. His freedom from these vices is all the more remarkable, because he had plenty of shrewdness. Along with that humour which is a native, involuntary motion of the mind, he had wit, which I may perhaps describe as a peculiarly clear and brilliant knowledge. The two are combined in this story illustrative of the desire of some Americans to make a speech.

At a certain execution, the culprit, as is the custom, having been asked if he had anything to say, declined to speak, whereupon a gentleman in the crowd, loath to see such a chance unimproved, stepped forward and said that, if no objection were made, he should like to avail himself of the opportunity by making a few remarks upon the protective tariff. This is an extreme expression of Artemus Ward's sense of the absurdity of certain persons. There is wit enough here, but it is only about one-fifth of the whole; the rest is the play of a rich and sudden humour. And it is the humour which robs the wit of contempt or ill-nature.

I should say something about Artemus Ward's spelling; it is very important. He himself thinks a great deal of his bad spelling and takes a great delight in it. He quotes the following about the Mormons, years after it was written, not correcting a single consonant or point of



punctuation : " I girded up my Lions and fled the Seen. I packt up my duds and left Salt Lake, which is a 2nd Soddum and Germorrer, inhabited by as theavin and onprincipled a set of retchis as ever dreu Breth in eny spot on the globe." He never neglects to spell the heavenly luminary as "son" and the male offspring as "sun." It would seem that if humorous effects can be produced by transpositions of this sort, anybody might make them. But the bad spelling of a poor joker is always foolish and ineffectual. A good humourist, like Artemus Ward or Thackeray, spells, not by accident, but with an intelligent intention. Thackeray's bad spelling defines the mind of his Jeames. Artemus Ward's defines the ridiculous mind of his showman. Such an expression as "infernal noncents" lights up the face of the old showman. The queer orthography may be said to spell his mind. It lets us into the secret of his way of



holding certain stock poetical ideas. You laugh at the old man, and you laugh at the contrast between the dignified associations of certain words, and the travesty of these as revealed by the bad spelling.

I have spoken of Ward's peculiar manner. This manner is in everything he writes, but I think it is more apparent in his less ostensible or demonstrable witticisms. Some of his jokes are so good, have such unmistakable novelty, that you would be ready to make an affidavit before a Justice of the Peace that they are good. Others again have a character which eludes the understanding ; their quality is an involuntary play of the spirit, the charm of which you only recognise when you have come into some sympathy with the humourist. Now, it is in this latter sort of humour, I think, that Ward's proper manner especially appears. I have not attempted to describe this ultimate manner ; perhaps it is unnecessary, or perhaps im-

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possible, to do it. But it is only fair to recognise that he has such a manner, that he is original and singular. I have seen him spoken of as one of a "school" of humorous writers; and there seems to be a notion that one joker is about as good as another. But this is not giving due credit to the literary character of this charming writer. He is no more capable of duplication than any other man of genius.



### III.

#### BYRON.

BYRON is a poet of whose mind it is not easy to gain a satisfactory sense. The reason of this is that he calls the imperative attention of the reader to parts of the experience which most other authors do not demand that the world shall examine. When we say we understand the personality of an author, we usually mean that we understand his manner of thinking. We do not see the whole man. Beyond an occasional trait that we may descry by accident, or beyond a very general notion of his character that we may obtain, we do not see the inner

life of the man ; nor do we seek to know this, any more than when we go to dine at a friend's house we wish to look into the kitchen. Of course, an author has a character, just as a house has a kitchen. But we do not think it necessary to look at it closely. White of Selborne, for instance, is an author whom we feel that we know. But we do not know his private character, as it was known to his family and his daily acquaintances. We know little about this, beyond feeling sure that he was an admirable and charming man. What we know is the reflecting, the observing, and the speaking man. White, indeed, is an author who does not in the least call our attention to his private character ; there are many authors who do this to a much greater degree than he. But scarcely any author is so exacting as Byron in this way. At every point one is curious to see the precise mind of the poet ; one wishes to inquire continually as

to the depth and sincerity of his feelings. Now, it is much more difficult to discover the truth as to these parts of the mind, if indeed, it is possible at all to discover it very completely, than to understand the thinking manner of an author.

By the thinking manner of an author I mean his manner of looking out from himself. Of thinking in the narrower sense of the word Byron did little. His sensibilities were mighty, but the accent of the purely mental part of him was light. He was deficient in perception into men's minds, although this has not been sufficiently recognised. Indeed, the general belief has been the contrary of this. He has been thought to have a strong understanding of human nature, and he has been considered a satirist. Now, I should doubt if there is to be found in Byron's works a line of genuine satire. Satire is the accurate description of folly, meanness, or wickedness; its material is a power-

ful knowledge of odious or contemptible states of mind. There can be no satire where this knowledge does not exist. Satire, it should be said, in order to be good, need not be just as against those who are satirised ; but it must bear upon its face the evidence of its fidelity to nature. For instance, in that familiar passage of Pope upon Addison, Pope may have been wrong in ascribing to Addison the state of mind which he there portrays with such felicity ; but the reader must feel that it is a human state of mind which he there describes. Now, Byron had little of this perception into states of mind. His satire has always seemed to me to resemble the mischievous pertness with which some spoilt son and heir astonishes his mamma, his maiden aunt, and the elderly dependants of the household. His letters, the records of his private conversations, and his poems, are full of a saucy frivolity, which Moore and



other persons, more sympathetic than discriminating, mistook for wit. But, as a rule, these smart words contain little sense or matter. Byron was in general deficient in that wit, the essence of which is a knowledge of the human mind. There is a lighter and less profound kind with which he was somewhat, but not remarkably, gifted. Nor was his mind to any considerable degree a humorous one, although he was not without that humour which is a sort of half-comic youthful fancy. Moreover, wit and the stronger humour are the qualities of adult men; and I have never been able to get rid of the impression that Byron was a boy, a brilliant and precocious boy, but still a boy. He may be said to have been in a sense a mature boy. There is a maturity of the boy and an immaturity of the man. The powers of a brilliant boy have often a clearness and wholeness which those of a young man lack. The young man is apt



to begin by questioning the world's ideas from the bottom, or by accepting only those to which his mind earnestly assents, and by challenging or ignoring the rest. The immature man is thus likely to run into eccentricity, obscurity, and a barren subtlety. But the boy accepts without question the commonly received ideas of the world, and often expresses them so well that it is difficult to distinguish his ready commonplaces, entirely wanting in virile sincerity and depth of knowledge of life, from the simple and sane utterances of those fortunate authors who express with perfection thoughts common to all the world. The mind of Byron was like that of such a boy, and, I think, to a considerable extent maintained this character to the end of his life. The reader may ask : Was Byron a boy when he wrote *Manfred* and *Don Juan* ? I think there is an adolescence mixed up with the dignity of *Manfred*. Perhaps one may not be con-

scious of it in the greater parts of Don Juan, but there the poet's mind is fixed upon the sensuous and the external.

I know that Byron has been thought of as a political satirist. The *Vision of Judgment* has been called a great satire. I do not see, however, that it has that perception into states of mind, either individual or aggregate, which is necessary to satire. Byron nowhere gives evidence of a clear perception into the mental nature of the despotism of that time. The superior orders of society were then completely in power, and, as they thought, for ever—the partakers of reactions usually believe they will last for ever. The sufferings of their friends and those of the world had given their cause an aspect of righteousness, and they thought that it had now been shown that the world could not get on without them. But along with this confidence there was a knowledge that the lower orders were to be feared as well as

despised. It was this consciousness which gave a peculiar energy and cruelty to the entire deportment of the higher towards the inferior classes of society. It was in opposition to this condition of the world that Byron wrote. There were other authors who were better satirists and critics of that reaction than Byron, because they were more intelligent than he and had a deeper perception than he into the human mind. It may, indeed, be said truly that it was not necessary to be thoughtful or intellectual in order to be a leader in that day ; the liberalism of that day was not critical ; it was a passion. It was an unthinking longing. It had no knowledge of any kind. It professed, for instance, to little practical caution or thought for the morrow. The prospect of liberty for Europe was at that time so remote that there was no need for men to face the problem of what they should do when they obtained it ; they had leisure to cry

for it as babes cry for the moon, and with as little risk of ever having it on their hands. The poet who felt this longing most energetically and expressed it best would have been no doubt the literary leader of his time. It has been thought by some that Byron was such a poet. This view has been expressed in an essay by an able and zealous English literary man. It may be the correct one ; it appears to me, however, rather theoretical than real. Looking simply at the man, I do not think that his political aspirations were as important a part of his character as this writer considers.

When we leave off thinking of the intellect of Byron and come to think of his sensibility and passion, his figure changes in an instant from that of a schoolboy almost to that of a demigod ; he becomes heroic and mysterious ; he invites us to penetrate his character. By the reader who is curious concerning Byron many of

his poems will be read less for the pleasure which as poems they give than in order to assist him to understand the mind of the poet. Nearly all these poems are, however, worth reading ; two of the qualities which they describe are always most interesting, the love and the fighting. The character of the love is, notwithstanding its simple bodily passion, usually a tender friendship. Byron had great ability for describing fighting scenes, perhaps greater than any modern writer. Sir Walter Scott is a good describer of fighting scenes, but he does not paint the passion of deadly enmity between combatants as Byron does ; indeed, he scarcely paints it at all. Byron's combatants fight like tigers ; Sir Walter Scott's like highly-honourable head boys at Rugby. Who does not love the magnanimity of Scott's heroes or fails to be charmed by their sweet and sunny fighting ? But it is always a surprise when they really kill one another ; we think it

must be by accident, or we expect that, like the angels of Milton when knocked over by the artillery of Satan, they will rise again, their corporeal essences still intact,

“ . . . the ethereal substance closed,  
Not long divisible.”

I recall a scene in one of the cantos of the *Lady of the Lake*, in which the Southern soldiers under Mar and the Clan of Rhoderick Dhu join battle in a vale which leads from one Highland loch to another. The minstrel describes the beginning of the fight at Loch Achray, and then hastens to the other end of the valley to await the coming of the battle. Now, that scene has always seemed to me such a nice accompaniment of a charming landscape, a bright morning atmosphere and a mountain tarn. I am not sure that it has not a kind of holiday character. You would go to see it as you would go to the races, in smart clothes and with a flower in the button-hole, and, as the tinkling of their musical swords drew nearer,



you would applaud with gloved hands. But you would expect to hear no groans of wounded and dying men. How unlike this are the battles in Byron's poems. The combatants of Byron have for one another a really feline hate. His imagination carries us into the midst of dark and implacable passions. He describes a character of man to whom an insult incompletely avenged is as irremediable a calamity as the loss of her virtue to a woman. Indeed, a complete revenge seems scarcely possible ; the death of his enemy in battle is scarcely an expiation of the humiliation he has suffered : one can fancy the victor standing baffled and with a sense of defeat before the body of the vanquished.

I suppose that many people would think the passions of hatred and revenge described by Byron exaggerated, if not impossible, and the descriptions of them affected. But the descriptions are true to



nature and, even where exaggerated, have a basis of fact. It is natural that many persons should be incredulous as to the correctness of these descriptions, and that they should think the feelings represented abnormal. Such states of mind, although they exist, are very much the exception at present. It is, indeed, surprising, considering what the possibilities of these passions are and their history, to see how little force they have in most people's minds. It is evident that they are gradually but surely growing weaker. This is being accomplished by the delicate and universal influence of democracy upon the individual character: this power works not through the moral sense of men but through their self-interest. It does not reprove the thought, but represses its manifestation. People cannot go on nursing thoughts which they are not permitted to express or exercise. Hence the passions themselves dwindle like those organs of

the animal creation which disappear by disuse.

But fine as Byron's descriptions of fighting scenes are, the critical reader is less interested in the descriptions themselves than curious about their relation to the poet. One asks the cause of the prominence which he gives to the passions of hatred and revenge and of the consideration which he bestows upon the fighting sentiment. One is teased to find out how he came by his Corsairs and Laras. There is in all his poems a dark, silent, and sinful man, who practises his energy in warfare, who is unhappy and careless of life, and is usually a profound cynic. What was this man's relation to Byron's own character?

It is hardly necessary to say that Byron was not a cynic, although it was in this light that he appeared in his own day. The following from Sir Egerton Brydges's book describes him as he was then believed

to be : "Taste and strong intellect mixed themselves up with all his mental movements. Lord Byron had a stern, direct, and severe mind, a sarcastic, disdainful, gloomy temper ; he had no light sympathy with heartless cheerfulness." Of course this is mistaken. Byron, indeed, was not without that scorn which accompanies the confusion and distress of mind resulting from immorality. But he was too facile and impressionable for the part of a cynic. He had not the cynic's power of attention upon mental matters, nor did he have another quality which I believe to be necessary to this character. One of the constituents of the cynical character is a strong moral sense. Now the moral sense of Byron—he had such a sense—was not strong ; it was crude. But it is not necessary to enter into a disquisition on the cynical character to prove that Byron was not a cynic. He evidently was not. Nor did he resemble this creation of his in hatred

or cruelty. I am sure that the strongest animosity which he ever cherished would have paled before that which many a respectable man carries under his waistcoat to church with him. Moreover, cynicism and hatred are adult passions, and Byron, we have seen, was never quite adult.

What, then, was Byron's relation to the fighting passion which is so prominent in his poems? This passion is one which men share with the animals, and is physical and universal. It is for this reason, I think, that men find the fighting passion easier to simulate than other passions. I believe, for instance, that actors are usually more correct in bellicose than in pathetic parts. Sometimes we come across an actor who is good in nothing else but fighting parts; who when he wishes to be sentimental or pathetic or humorous is a stick, but who as soon as he has to imitate the behaviour of a man in a quarrel will become spirited and natural. There

is such a man at present on the London boards. This, by the way, is a young man, and perhaps young men are apt to be better at this kind of acting than old ones, they being nearer to the passion. Boys are often remarkably good reciters of fighting scenes. Boys, for that matter, are apt to be very good reciters in general. They have little false shame or self-consciousness, and they believe in the poetry and eloquence which they admire as they will never believe in anything of their own. A boy with a talent for recitation, will, without thought, in reciting pieces of this kind often be more correct in his emphasis than Mr. Booth or Mr. Irving. But boys are certainly better at pieces of a bellicose than of a pathetic character. I once had a schoolfellow who had a most remarkable talent for the imitation of the fighting passion, and I think that my recollection of this boy helps me to understand the *rationale* of Byron's bellicose poetry. I

have never seen anything bolder or more true to nature than the manner of this boy in reciting accounts of combats and battles. I should make this explanation of his talent. He was an amiable boy enough, but I believe that he had, hindered and subdued by other and contrary qualities, a strong native and probably inherited instinct for fighting. But he had besides—and this was the more important cause of his talent—that natural anger which is the result of a superfluity of mental and physical life. As a bright and lively animal of the male kind, he had this in common with the gamecock and the young stallion. It was this which prompted the catlike gesture of deadly hate with which he throttled an imaginary foe or the rhythm with which he intoned his cry of defiance or of exultation in victory. Now, I think that Byron's relation to the fighting passages in his works was like that of this boy to the bellicose pieces which he re-



cited. He, too, had a native and probably inherited instinct for fighting. He had also that natural rage which is the result of a superfluity of life ; for perhaps no man ever had a greater superfluity of life than he.

Perhaps the following explanation might be made of his Corsairs and Laras. It was during his journey to Greece that his mind came into its first full force. He was then in a part of the world where a great deal of fighting was done, and saw much of people who had a high opinion of physical courage and prowess. The life which he describes in his poems, no doubt, did exist in those regions at that time. The Turk, perhaps, resembled the brave and sedate being which he is painted in the *Giaour* and the *Bride of Abydos*. At any rate, he was thought to be like this. I have heard Mr. Trelawney say that an old Turk was the only real nobleman he had ever seen. Epirus and



Albania had, no doubt, many desperate fellows. There were besides certain Levantine Europeans who were dark and singular persons. Byron met a few such characters, or, at any rate, heard a great many stories about them. Nothing was more natural than that these characters and the life they led should produce a profound impression upon his mind. He was a young man with a passion for glory. It is natural for ambitious young persons to wish to distinguish themselves in the qualities which are admired by the people among whom they live. It would, for instance, have been natural for a young man of a susceptible turn, who should have gone to Alabama or Mississippi in the "flush times" of forty years ago, to have admired the heroes of the bloody duels and desperate street and tavern fights which were the fashion of the time; he would have looked with great interest at these men; if he did not seek to imitate

them, they would, at any rate, have been a great deal in his thoughts. In the same way Byron's visit to the Mediterranean filled his mind with admiration of the life of that region. He admired the character of man he met with there. He received this character into his imagination with all the energy and power of sympathy which he possessed. The impression which it made upon him was profound and lasting. Years afterwards, on Trelawney's intimating to him one day when they were playing billiards, that under certain circumstances he would have killed some one in a particularly unscrupulous manner, Byron said with evident envy and admiration: "You're a cool hand." This was ten years after the visit to Greece; one would think that after so many years he must have been bored with the subject. But from the tenacity of this idea in the mind of Byron we may judge the strength of its first reception. I fancy

that he built air-castles about battles ; he dreamed, no doubt, of many fights in which he acquitted himself with unexampled and totally impossible success. Of course, he did not do as many other young men would have done, really go and do some actual fighting. That would not have been like the poet, whose mind is for him a sufficient field of battle. Such characters as Byron have an irresolution which keeps them out of trouble, and which is as wholesome and proper for them as are the instinct and sure judgment which carry men of a different character so directly to their mark. There is about their small essays in practical affairs an insignificance and ineptitude which is in singular contrast with their grave thoughts and high intentions. If, by any unsound and unnatural movement, they do commit themselves to any serious action, they are pretty sure to discover that they have made a mistake. When Hamlet finally

does strike, he kills Polonius. Byron's final career in Greece shows what a step he took when he left that land of dreams in which he was so irresistible, to have to do with such immalleable objects as human beings, and to undertake to interfere with that course of events which is so sure to take its own time and which is so unconscious and careless of individual men.

The period of Byron's first visit to Greece was perhaps the most interesting of his life. During that visit a mind of extraordinary native force at the hour of its first awakening was brought with unoccupied energies in contact with a great and exciting scene. His mind there found just what it most needed, an object. He did not have an invention which could have supplied him with themes. His talent, as he himself said, was of the descriptive kind. Now, a descriptive poet is in reality more inventive than descrip-

tive. He expresses himself quite as much as the object which he means to describe. The object is only the occasion of all that he would express. It suggests certain images and musical thoughts; these together with the object form an *ensemble* which lives and works in the mind, and demands to be uttered. This was the manner of Byron's poetical thoughts. He was imaginative and he expressed himself more than anything else, but an object was nevertheless necessary to him. It was particularly necessary to him at this time in order to awaken and employ the energies of his mind; and the dull and familiar face of English life could not so well serve this purpose as the vivid and unaccustomed aspect of the new scene. That scene afforded a mixture of important elements. Besides containing the theatre of classic history and literature, it presented what interested him far more deeply, the then almost novel field of Oriental

manners. There were also those tales of recent or contemporary adventure to which he listened so earnestly. The whole was situated in a region of the most brilliant natural beauty. It was subjects conceived in the midst of this scene which now absorbed his attention and upon which his mind dwelt with the demonic force of early genius. Byron is now in the midst of all the fortunate and irresistible madness of youth. Twenty-five years ago he had not begun to exist, but with what a bold and commanding eye does he look upon the aged scene about him. The glance of that eye is superior to the authority of history and the ancient framework of nature. This ancient scene was got up for his amusement ; the sun and the moon, which have witnessed the countless generations of men, are his servitors. The eye of youth, we must remember, as it opens upon the world, finds the spectacle of existence stationary. We who are older



see society in the act of falling into new forms—see even the faces of men and women changing before our eyes like the figures of a kaleidoscope when slowly shaken; but to the youth the child is always a child; the old man has always leaned upon his staff; the strong will always rejoice in their strength; that colour in the cheek of girlhood, which has in a few hours bloomed and shall in a few hours wane, he believes to be eternal; the aspect of the world which his glance reveals is absolute and permanent, while of the whole appearance he is himself the centre and the master. So it is with the poet at this time. How significant is the expression of Byron's countenance and figure as we see him on the deck of that vessel in the Mediterranean. His face wears the mute and stern look of one who knows that he has within him things of the deepest stress and moment—things which, once uttered, must fix the astonished



gaze of men. These secrets have long been accessible to the world in many volumes of famous poetry ; but even these vivid expressions are pale and cold, when compared with the living thoughts, the passions, the longings, that lurk and burn in the depths of that young mind.

Such was the character of the young man who in the year 1809 sailed on board the brig *Spider* from Malta to Previsa. Galt, perhaps the most intelligent and discriminating of his biographers, who made this passage with him, thus describes him. "He was often strangely rapt. Sitting amid the shrouds and ratlines in the tranquillity of the moonlight, churning an inarticulate melody, he seemed almost apparitional, suggesting dim reminiscences of him who shot the albatross. He was a mystery in a winding sheet crowned with a halo. The influence of the incomprehensible phantasma which hovered about Lord Byron has been more or less felt by

whoever approached him. That he sometimes came out of the cloud and was familiar and earthly is true ; but his dwelling was amid the murk and the mist ; the home of his spirit was in the abyss of the storm and the hiding-places of guilt. He was at the time I am speaking scarce two and twenty, and could claim no higher praise than having written a clever worldly-minded satire ; and yet it was impossible even then to reflect on the bias of his mind without experiencing a presentiment that he was destined to execute some singular and ominous purpose." It is true that at this time he was only known as the author of a saucy poem of the satirical description, but he had already published lines which show to the full some of his greatest qualities, the force, the mad and sweet boyish music, and boundless eagerness of mind.

The poetry of Byron is marked in the main by intense truth. He was veracious in two senses—first, in the extreme inten-

sity of his thoughts ; and secondly, in the fidelity with which he expresses just what is in his mind. He is truer than most other poets on account of the exceeding vivacity of his impressions ; his elation, his pain, his admiration of female beauty, all the motions of his mind, are livelier than those of most other poets. His admiration of female beauty has such violence, delicacy, and precision. His elation is so keen and joyful. Sit down by the fire some pleasant morning with his book in hand and open carelessly at the first four lines of the *Corsair*, "O'er the glad waters of the dark blue sea," etc. You will find that these lines have force enough nearly to turn you out of your chair. In an instant you see around you the sparkle of a million waves and you look fathoms deep into the morning blue of the Mediterranean ether ; for fully ten minutes you are appalled at the mistake you made when you did not take up this piratical

kind of life. Byron's expressions, indeed, seem to supersede those of other poets and to reprove them as being too tame and cold. He was one who rushed before the world, exclaiming that his elders, with the poor generalities in which they sought to express existence for the instruction of his childhood, had been arrant deceivers ; that society and nature were more brilliant, the passions brighter or darker, women more beautiful, and all the colours of life deeper and stronger, than he had been taught or the poets had said. Moreover, his poetical illusion is more genuine than that of most other poets. In how many others do we find, in the same degree, that fury which literary convention assigns to the singers of early society. This young English gentleman, recently from Cambridge, has the frenzy and strong possession of an old bard, with a long beard, who might stand with a lyre by the side of a "foaming flood." Compare, for in-

stance, with the *Isles of Greece* the beautiful but somewhat finical composition which Gray's own bard recites over the stream into which he is about to plunge ; it reads like the lecture of a professor of poetry.

I say that he is also remarkable for the fidelity with which he expresses just what is in his mind. He is troubled with no halting prudence. He conceals nothing for fear that it may be immoral or ridiculous. This quality is, no doubt, partly due to the force and simplicity of his mind ; and I am not sure that it is one to be lauded or imitated. But whatever may be the explanation of this quality of Byron's, it is certain that few even among honest people express their minds as faithfully as he did. Yet at the same time that Byron is intenser and truer than most other poets, there is in his poetry an admixture of unpleasant falsehood. When he is writing of love or war or liberty, his

pen often seems to be running along in accordance with a certain convention—a convention indeed of his own creation—with scarcely any reference to the truth of what he is saying. This may have had something to do with that mental adolescence of which I have spoken, but I have often thought it to go deeper than that. I have at times fancied that he was wanting in “clean grit” and have thought of him with an eye somewhat furtive, a manner exaggerated and unsteady, a behaviour in which evasiveness was blended with an incessant unrest, the result of an incessant self-accusation.

Byron said that he had always had a want of self-respect ; he said also that he believed the last opinion which he heard. One might have supposed both of these things, but they are interesting and have a connection with one another. There is such a quality as a native want of self-respect. It may exist in people independ-



ently of anything they have done to produce it. There are certain people whose disposition it is to accuse themselves. Where this disposition exists, matter for accusation may always be found. A man of this temper will ascribe to himself with almost a kind of greed any bad quality to which his attention is directed. If it is not at first sight obvious that he can do this justly, he does not hesitate to employ a little ingenuity to that end. The mind of such a man is like a court in which the prosecutor is watchful, able, and determined, and the counsel for the defence feeble, timid, and silent. If the man have a keen imagination he is all the more at the mercy of this disposition, for he will make an image of himself practising this wicked quality, and with him seeing and believing are one. Now this is, no doubt, an exaggeration of Byron's character, but he had the unsteadiness of mind and violence of mood which are likely to ac-



company such a disposition. He had, indeed, a temper somewhat resembling that which I have here described, and would have had it, though his life had been far more correct than it was. The poem which contains the most interesting account of his relation to this subject is *Manfred*. *Manfred* is inferior as a work of art to many of his works, but I doubt if there is one of them which shows the dignity of his mind as it does. In *Manfred* the poet represents one who is cut off by his misdeeds from the fellowship of the race. He is without a human tie. The reader will remember, for instance, that when he meets the friendly mountaineer on the Jungfrau, although these two men may exchange kindly greetings, and though they may take one another by the hand, and though to any other eyes than those of *Manfred* they may not appear to differ greatly, an impassable barrier divides them. One thinks of *Manfred* as without even a

political relation ; he has but the faintest possible connection with that country for which he is ready to die were he fit for so honourable a devotion. Nay, a circle is drawn about him separating him from the entire universe. It is shown in the poem that nature is not of such as he and his thoughts. She is careless of his overthrow and of his abasement before her image. The stain of sunrise remains above the hills as deep and fresh as when first seen by the eyes of infancy. We may imagine a momentary dialogue which nature holds with Manfred. In the midst of her incessant and simultaneous activities—her pensive and profound dreams and far-darting waking thoughts—for one rapidly passing moment of time her mighty and nimble consciousness rests upon the sufferer. There lives for an instant upon her countenance a smile of gay derision, which runs quickly into the remote and keen expression of an angelic mirth ; that smile

is awakened by the thought that there could be aught in common between herself and this alien mind.

The reader of *Manfred* perceives how gentle is the ecclesiastical condemnation reserved for the offender in comparison with that which nature and himself pronounce. To such as Manfred, Christianity, with its vast heaven occupying the upper air, its puny hell, its kind Madonna, its many bright and grateful observances, and that air which it wears of exercising an almost comic supervision over the universe, seems like the castle-building of childish and thoughtless optimists. In the final scenes of the play, it is the priest who is that madman and not Manfred ; the intrusion of his company upon the damned spirit of the lord of the castle is represented as irrelevant and absurd.

Of course *Manfred* is not an exact expression of Byron's character, but it is, no doubt, a true expression of a state of

mind which lingered much about him. The willingness to accept death which Byron ascribes to Manfred is a part of Byron's own character. A readiness to meet death halfway was one of his traits. This feeling was of course due to the despair and confusion resulting from the character of his life. He said to a friend once, "Who cares to live? not I; I don't care for death a damn." There is no reason to doubt the sincerity of this. A man with a state of mind like Byron's has not the normal sense of the human species respecting death. He does not think of it as the end, inevitable indeed, but still remote enough to allow him his allotted portion of activity and enjoyment; to him it does not lie a good way off, to be reached after many goings up and down in the world. He sees, if one may say so, an open grave by the side of him.

It is necessary to keep in mind Byron's relation to his contemporaries. In judg-

ing any subjective poet the impression produced upon his generation needs to be especially considered. The particular quality of the subjective poet is his power to influence the characters of men who have never known or seen him as if he lived in the same house or village with them ; in other words, his power to throw upon their minds the spectacle of himself and to rule them through his hold upon their sympathies. It is his contemporaries rather than posterity whom he affects by this power. Men may be affected in this manner by a poet of a former age, but not, I think, to the same degree as by a poet of their own age. This is so for two reasons. The sympathy of the reader with the poet of a former age is likely to be individual and singular ; but others besides himself are influenced by the contemporaneous poet, and the effect of the poet upon him is heightened by the impression which many share. Secondly, the

poet of the past is known ; his position has been determined. Into no matter how close contact the reader may come with him, he cannot but be mindful of the position which posterity has assigned him. But the poet of the present is not known ; he has not been determined. He is a comet whose orbit has not been ascertained. The brilliant intruder hangs in the zenith ; and men looking upward do not know whether, like other friendly visitants which have before appeared to beautify the firmament, it too will depart upon its appointed path, or whether its downward track may bear somewhat near their own planet. Should the latter event happen, no harm would be done, since the splendid object is only made of gas. And as all comets are composed of the same gases, so all poets are made of much the same principles and affections. The new poet is after all but the old human mind in a new dress. But men are not able to remember this.



For it is one of the powers of the subjective poet to communicate a kind of paralysis to the minds of his readers, by means of which it happens that they are unable to look at him coolly or to judge him with any decision. This power, indeed the general power of the subjective poet, appears to be due mainly to the superiority of the poet's will, to the absorbed concentration of his mind upon his own thoughts, to his sense of the importance of those thoughts.

If the effect of the poet upon his contemporaries be the measure of his subjective power, perhaps no poet ever had this power to the degree that Byron had. Old people in America yet relate, as evidence of the passion with which he was read in their youth, that in parts of the country where books were few, his poems were copied out in manuscript and handed on from house to house. There was some clever man of that day who declared the fourth canto of *Childe Harold* to be the



greatest literary achievement ever performed. Those vexatious and impertinent notes in Moore's edition, in which the opinion of a reviewer is thrust upon you when you would rather be getting your own notion of a fine passage, serve at least the purpose of keeping before you the public which Byron addressed. They show you the mind of the contemporary reader. The state of mind of a Byron-struck man of that day may be regarded as a kind of register of the degree of the poet's force. That state of mind is to be seen in the periodicals and the published correspondence of the time ; these contain an interesting record of the feat which Byron performed upon his generation.

A result of the great impression produced by Byron was that in time the public became deeply bored with him. A reminiscence has lasted even to this time of the disgust which a surfeit of the Byronic ideas and personality produced in

the minds of the last generation. To this reminiscence is due the coldness and unwillingness with which Byron is read at this time. Although he is no doubt read more than formerly, I believe the feeling of the usual reader of the present day towards his works to be that of a cold curiosity. Until he has become interested in these poems, he is really averse from them ; and he is particularly inaccessible to those parts in which the personal character of the poet is asserted. Such a passage as this, for instance, offends and puzzles him :—

“ Though the strained mast should quiver as a  
reed,  
And the rent canvas fluttering strew the gale,  
Still must I on.”

“ Very fine poetry certainly,” he would say. “ But why such a fuss ? The poet evidently wishes to go upon a journey. Why not ? *Bon voyage !* He should get a Cook’s ticket,” etc. This is no doubt

an impudent state of mind to hold toward such poetry ; but I believe that a reader of this day would be apt to resent the poet's demand that his idiosyncrasies should be scrutinised. It would appear absurd to him that the great world should give the attention due mighty questions and enterprises to the personal qualities of one man.

I may here say that Byron has suffered from the fact that his generation put him a little outside the pale of common humanity. They thought him something more than a man. Of course this was a mistake ; of course he was but a man, with a man's limitations, and having only such thoughts and feelings as are possible to a man. The mistake of his generation was due to the fact that they did not see the man, and the whole man, clearly. He had obtained so much of the public sympathy and attention, and he took up so large a place in the mind of individuals, that men did not

retain their self-possession and discrimination in looking at him, and were not able to resist the incorrect notions concerning him of which society was full. Moreover, the violence and peculiarity of the emotions to which he called their attention made it especially difficult for them to critically comprehend the poet. Whosoever fault this was, it certainly was not Byron's. It was no fault of his if people borrowed from one another incorrect ideas about him ; it was no fault of his if the experience of common men did not enable them to comprehend and gauge his emotions. It was, therefore, through no fault of his that he came to be considered as rather extra-human. I think that the fame of Byron has suffered considerably from this mistake, both in his own day and since ; for this way of regarding him has been to some extent received by this generation from the two preceding ones. It is one which time, no doubt, will correct.



#### IV.

### THACKERAY'S RELATION TO ENGLISH SOCIETY.

IT is apparent to the readers of Thackeray that the mind of that great writer was, in some respects, a turbid and a confused one. This confusion was due to his sensitiveness and to his having certain qualities which I shall refer to further on ; but it was especially due to his having, in a high degree, two traits which are inconsistent and difficult to reconcile,—a love of the world and a love of that simple and original life of man cared for by the poet. A worldly man is a simple character. A poet or philosopher is comparatively a

simple character. Each of these may pursue a contented and simple existence. But confusion and discontent begin when the interest is divided between the world and those things which poets care for. If irresolution and the inability to decide what one wants are added to this character, the mind is taken up with a dialogue of thoughts, which, like the combat of principles in the Manichean theology, may go on for ever. This was Thackeray's state of mind. He discovered daily the vanity of mundane matters, but the discovery had nevertheless to be made the day after. He was born a poet and a humourist. His eyes were fixed on the original human nature so strongly that it would have been impossible for him to withdraw them. He could not cease to be a poet; but he could not forget the world. He believed in the world, and bestowed a reluctant but inevitable worship upon it. He had also a desire for position



in it which he was unable to put aside. But I doubt if anybody with a mind like his, and living as he did, could have put it aside. People do not usually overcome a deep-seated disposition by an effort of the will, but by putting themselves in circumstances amidst which they may forget it. The thing is then out of sight, and is, therefore, out of mind. But Thackeray lived amidst just those circumstances in which it was most difficult to avert his mind from social ambition and pride of position. In Switzerland he might have forgotten it ; but he could not forget it in Pall Mall ; and Pall Mall was his proper place. His character was strongly social. Society and human beings had educated him, and he lived upon them. There was nothing for him, therefore, but to get on as best he could with the people among whom his lot fell.

The nature of that society is, perhaps, the most egotistical in the world. No

other society so compels its constituents to be egotists, to be thinking continually upon the subject of their own consequence. Thackeray's lot was, therefore, cast in a society the tendency of which was to educate rather than to allay his egotism, to excite to the highest degree his social pride. Doubtless, in some societies the mere fact of having written great works would give a man a social position sufficiently high to satisfy any ambition. Such is the case in America, and such is said to be the case in France ; but such is not the case in England. Thackeray was aware that no matter what works he wrote he could never be the equal of many people whom he was in the habit of seeing. He knew that though he spoke with the tongue of men and of angels, though he had the gift of prophecy and understood all mysteries and all knowledge, though he could remove mountains, and though he gave his body to be burned, he could

never be as good as the eldest son of a great peer. He might indeed have gone apart and lived among artists and other people of his own sort, whose society he said, and no doubt truly, that he preferred to any other. He might have given himself up to admiring the virtues and graces of people who make no figure in the world. But then he would have had to write himself down as one of the excluded, and this he would not have been able to do. As he could not obtain social position by writing great works, he was compelled to supplement his literary success by the pursuit of society.

It is easy to see that such a man as Thackeray, in making an object of getting on in society, would be at a disadvantage, as compared with others in the same line. See the way in which your entirely and simply worldly man goes to work. Such pride as he has he is able to put in his pocket. He never falls in love with any

but the right people. He is betrayed into no sudden movements of the heart or fancy—supposing him to be capable of such—with obscure or doubtful persons. He wastes no words on people who cannot help him on the way. “This one thing I do,” he says, and, like most people who have one object, usually reaches it. Thackeray, on the contrary, saw and could not help caring for the souls of people. He liked the good, the simple, the honest, the affectionate. It is evident, therefore, in this business, Thackeray had too much to carry. The result was confusion and unrest. Yet he was never able to let it alone. Not only did he follow it in the common way, but we find him ready at any time to give himself up to some office or appointment, the possession of which will, in his own notion, make him more respectable. Thus, he wanted to be Secretary of Legation at Washington. He would have been of no use in such a

place. Why did he want it? Perhaps he remembered that Addison and Prior were diplomatists, and was ready to choose a profession with the instincts of a fancier of old china. But the real reason was this : there, no doubt, seemed to him a particular decency in the occupation of a diplomate which he wished to transfer to and unite with himself. Every man, of course, may choose what objects he shall pursue, and Thackeray had, perhaps, at this time done enough to earn the right to be idle. But then he had what so few have—a real task to perform. He had an unmistakable employment cut out for him by his own genius, and prepared for him by the age ; his head was full of great works which he wished to write ; he wanted money, and he could make more money by writing these works than by doing anything else. At the time of which we are speaking, he had only ten more years of life, though, of course, he

did not know this. Yet he was willing to stop his own proper business, his "Work with a big W," as he would have called it, to go to playing with sealing-wax; for the consciousness of belonging to a profession, which in his eyes appears to have worn an air of peculiar respectability, he was ready to step down from one of the highest literary thrones of the day that he might accept a position in which he should copy the words of masters at home who were scarcely conscious of him, and take lessons of juniors, who regarded him as an interloper and a good-for-nothing.

It was because Thackeray so desired the respect of others, was so anxious for the social consideration of the people he was meeting, that he thought so much about snobs and snobbishness. Shakespeare says that the courtier has a "melancholy, which is proud." By this we understand that the courtier's mind is apt to be busy with the question of the favour



in which he is held by the great personages with whom he lives, and of the consideration which he enjoys in that society which constitutes their *entourage*. This melancholy is not by any means confined to courts or courtiers. It was the "courtier's melancholy" which Thackeray had. He was a sensitive man. It was, in general, his habit to take the world hard, and it was especially natural to him to suffer strongly from the unfriendly sentiments of others toward himself. He looked at the snobbish mind so closely and with such interest, because that mind had been directed upon himself. He examined it as a private soldier examines the cat-o'-nine-tails. It was the quickness of his sensibility to disrespect or unkindness,—it was his keenly sympathetic consciousness of the hostile feelings of people toward himself,—which awakened him to such energetic perception of the snobbish moods. It was this which caused him to

look with such power upon a snob. During his fifty years of life he had conned a vast number of snobbish thoughts, and must have accumulated a great quantity of snob-lore. No doubt, he thought too much about snobs. The late Mr. Bagehot said that Thackeray judged snobbishness too harshly. Mr. Bagehot went on to say that it is only to be expected that people should wish to rise in society ; that it is no such great sin to admire and court the successful, and to neglect the unsuccessful. It was Mr. Bagehot's mistake to suppose the thoughts of one society to be those of the world, to take as universal a sentiment which, in the degree in which he knew it, was merely British. Certainly no other people in the world think so much about consequence as the English. Egotism in that country is made into a science. The subtlety which the subject is capable of in the hands of clever or even of stupid persons is surprising ; for a large part of

the community it would seem to constitute a liberal education.

I may here add that Thackeray was very much alive to the feelings toward himself of those who looked at him as a man rather than as a member of society. Much as Thackeray wished to be considered, he wished even more to be liked. He did not care very much to be admired; he had little vanity, and he liked kindness better than anything else in the world. He suffered keenly from the unfriendly thoughts of others concerning himself, and, one might fancy, half believed them. We might hazard the guess that he was one upon whom opinions, especially if they concerned himself or his affairs, had a great effect. His doubting temper disposed him to disbelieve his own opinions, no matter with what pains and care he might have formed them. The opinion of another, on the contrary, was a fact; it was, at any rate, a fact that the opinion had been expressed.

Thus, he gave to the lightest breath of another the superstitious attention which an enlightened and sceptical heathen might have yielded to an oracle in which he was still half ready to believe. He had no large share of that just and right self-esteem which Milton teaches.

I have no intention here to write a literary criticism upon Thackeray's books. It seems to me a difficult subject to write upon. There comes a time in the history of nearly every great author when it is hard to write a good criticism of him. This is when he has been fully learned by the public, but has not yet been forgotten. During the first few years of a great author's appearance his devoted admirers are apt to believe him a much more wonderful person than he really is. They forget that Homer, Cervantes, and Fielding are not likely to be surpassed, and that this new writer is after all only one more literary man. The criticism of these ad-

mirers is nearly certain to be partial and without proportion, but they have a fresh and direct sympathy which is genuine. On the other hand, a forgotten author may be criticised both with justice and sympathy. But it is hard to judge, either freshly or justly, contemporaneous authors whom we have got by heart. The public has become somewhat bored with them. Familiarity with them has bred a kind of satiety. This appears to be just now the feeling of the public toward Thackeray and Tennyson. A critic cannot well help sharing the general feeling. I do not, therefore, intend to attempt to criticise Thackeray's writings. But I think I may hazard the opinion that he was rather a critic than an artist. The reader of his stories, no matter how keenly he may be interested in them, never forgets the presence of a powerful and marked intellect which has completely won his attention. I think it will be agreed that Thackeray

does not in any way, as an artist, reach the highest mark. Some of his characters are very real, but not so real as those of Fielding. Some of his scenes are dramatic, but not so dramatic as those in the *Notre Dame* of Victor Hugo. If a few of his characters, such as Major Pendennis and Lord Steyne, are real, there are many which are only half real. Of many of his characters you ask yourself whether they are real or not; you may decide upon reflection that they are; but you do not ask this question concerning the most perfect characters; you never ask whether Sophia Western is real. I cannot agree with the opinion which Mr. Trollope gives, in the little book on Thackeray which he has lately published, that Barry Lyndon is a very real character. The character seems to me unsteady, inconsistent, and, in a word, unreal; the author himself hardly believes in it. In *Beatrix Esmond*, the broad marks in the character of an



ambitious and brilliant woman are well given by the incidents of the novel, and that scene in which she and the Prince are found together by Esmond at Castlewood is highly true and dramatic. But Thackeray does not make the wilfulness and the brilliancy of the woman as dazzling and charming as he had wished them to be, or, perhaps, had conceived them to be. His imagination has flagged, and he altogether fails in his obvious efforts to goad it into a fresh apprehension of the character. The reader presently refuses to believe in her coquetry and brilliancy; these qualities, for instance, are quite overdone in that passage in which it is meant that the reader shall be charmed by the heroine's management of her little boots. It is not at all a brilliant young woman in the smallest boots, with high red heels, who says and does the things there described; we have only a poor, tired novelist, but half able to express or apprehend his idea.

Much of the description of historical characters, on the other hand, in *Esmond* is really very good ; we can quite suppose Steele and Addison to be very like what they are there represented to be. But, again, it often happens that Thackeray's invention becomes thin when he brings his characters in contact with well-known historical persons. He says, in *Barry Lyndon*:

"These persons (I mean the romance writers), if they take a drummer or a dustman for a hero, somehow manage to bring him in contact with the greatest lords and most notorious personages of the empire, and, I warrant me, there's not one of them but, in describing the battle of Minden, would manage to bring Prince Ferdinand, and my Lord George Sackville, and my Lord Granby, into presence. . . . A poor corporal (as I then had the disgrace of being) is not generally invited into the company of commanders and the great."

I doubt if any reader of *Quentin Durward* is disturbed by the improbability of a poor Scottish archer living on terms of some intimacy with Louis XI. All that is necessary is that the story should seem true

to the reader. It is not at all needful that the meeting of the characters should be historically probable. When Barry Lyndon becomes a great man and goes to London, he meets Dr. Johnson. The meeting is probable enough, but no reader can imagine for a moment that the dialogue between these two given in the novel ever took place.

It was as a speaker in his proper person that Thackeray was most distinguished. He was a great satirist, and, like all great satirists, he sees directly the state of mind which he contemns. How accurately he describes the snobbish mind in this sentence:

“The flattery is not so manifest as it used to be a hundred years since. Young men and old have hangers-on and led captains, but they assume an appearance of equality, borrow money or swallow their toads in private, and walk abroad arm in arm with the great man, and call him by his name without his title.”

At the same time, Thackeray knew where

to find spiritual graces. He admired the girl who played the piano, and the nice young man who sang, and papa and mamma who looked on ; the bright looks of smart misses of fourteen ; the parental feelings ; the domestic affections in general ; and he, no doubt, knew well that wherein he failed to admire these things the fault was in himself and not in them. Thackeray had indeed the poet's capacity for loving Tom, Dick, and Harry. Not that he is quite an angel in this way. He does not for instance, appear to have liked middle-aged women. When he has occasion to speak of any supposititious mother-in-law, he is likely to assert that she is an "excellent" woman.

It is said that Thackeray had much at heart the wish to be regarded as a preacher. He was a great satirist of the social vices and follies of his time, and was to this extent a preacher. But when he begins really to preach I do not

think he is so good. I do not like him when he begins to use such words as piety, humility, and self-abnegation, reverence, and the like. His invocations to virtue and religion often appear to me sentimental. There are a few persons who may use these good words with advantage to their fellows; these men are the natural priests of society. But for most people virtue is a thing to be practised and not talked about. Thackeray seems to me to have had too little self-confidence, to have been too self-accusing, to have been a good priest. We do not care for a preacher who never quite knows whether his true place is in the pulpit or on the stool of the penitent. A profound perplexity and confusion, a sincere humility in the presence of life, marked the mind of Thackeray strongly, and he is never so eloquent or so true as when he is expressing these feelings. Read, for instance, his account of the death of old Sedley. His pathos

is profound ; he has great humanity. He looks at the features of human misery with a candid gaze ; nor can any atmosphere other than that of common daylight blur for his eyes their exact outlines.

He had the gift of humour to a very great degree. It is possible, perhaps, to distinguish two stages of this gift in his mind. The humour of his earlier writings is the more daring and joyous. When he began to write English society was full of certain minor absurdities, upon which he could employ his mockery. There was the nonsense of the fashionable literature, the dulness of the philanthropists, etc. The extravagances which followed Byron were a good subject for him. It was yet the day of well-born and well-bred misanthropes. The novels were filled with people who were very polite and very rich, who spelt their adjectives with capital letters, and who were in their own opinion and that of the novelist superior to the rest of the



world, although it would be difficult to say why. It is years since I have read that admirable novel *Pelham*, but I remember that it contained one of these superior people who, with everything to make him happy in life, was always knocking himself about in grave-yards as recklessly as the Pantaloon at a Christmas performance. Thackeray made fun of this nonsense. He laughed at certain literary ladies, with their "Annuals," their "Lives of celebrated British and Furren Washer-women" and other works. He made fun of the philanthropists. He laughed at the "Destitute Orange-girl," and the "Distressed Muffin-man." Those were the days of great labours in the emancipation of slaves and the conversion of heathen. These good works were not without their extravagances. The followers of Buxton and Wilberforce (such is the effect on ardent and serious people of devotion to one object) came to regard negro and angel as

nearly synonymous terms. So Thackeray laughed at the blacks. All this he did in the fulness of animal spirits and with the strength of young fancy. He wrote on these subjects in that tone of racy mockery which is one of his most brilliant gifts. He is most delightful when he is in this frame, because the reader sees clearly his own enjoyment of the good things he writes. We know the happiness which the new thought has awakened in his sensitive imagination. One can fancy his pleasure when he makes his snob, who is about to commit suicide, look out of the window and address the moon with the words "Ho pallid Horb!" All of Thackeray's early writings exhibit this gift. He retained it until increase of years and the contact of life had rendered his page graver and perhaps tamer.

One may discern in his later writings another kind of humour. There is a humour which is comparative and philosophic ; and

I think much of this may be seen in the more mature works of Thackeray. This humour may, perhaps, be defined as the sense of the simultaneous existence of things widely separate and difficult to reconcile. If it is true of poetry that it glances from heaven to earth, and from earth to heaven, it is still more true of humour, which is, in one of its forms, a comprehensive feeling of the varieties and contraries of existences, such as virtue and vice, the soul and the body, the great and the small, the beautiful and the obscene, the real and the conventional. The sense of the contact of these inconsistencies awakens in the mind of the humourist a pleasing wonder. His mind nestles under these grand contradictions with a delighted sense of its own insignificance. This is the character of much of Shakspeare's humour. The poet loves to bring things together from the four quarters of the world. While thinking upon field daisies, blue violets, and merry larks, he

does not forget that there are such things as injured husbands ; he brings together into the same thought the " parson's saw," the " roasted crabs," and the " red nose " of Marian ; and delights to think under the thick sky of the long winter's night, concealing the cry of the owl and the " foul ways," that " greasy Joan doth keel the pot."

We see the same humour in the conversation in *Coriolanus* on peace and war. Again, where the conspirators, kneeling about the body of Cæsar and bathing their hands in his blood, are made to consider how often, in future ages, the scene shall be acted over, one can fancy that Shakspeare, while conscious of the splendour of the thought, had also a daring pleasure at the contact, in the same sentence, of the great and famous incident with the ephemeral, obscure, and unreal stage. In some of the finest parts of Shakspeare a succession of great but dissimilar ideas leaves

upon the mind of the reader a humorous sense of contrast, and it is possible that this sense existed also in the mind of the poet. In such parts the poet is perhaps standing by, amused with the contact and chaos of his incongruous thoughts. Do we not see this where Prospero turns from some advice to two young people just engaged, given in the sage and experienced tone of the man of the world, on the extreme importance of a certain moderation in their behaviour, to declare the unimportance and unreality of the visible universe, and to foretell that the solid globe shall dissolve as quickly as the vision which his magic has just evoked and dismissed?

We have, in the life of one who has expressed himself so fully as Thackeray has done, that most interesting object, a man as he is when hereditary traits, native qualities, education and circumstances, have done their work upon him. The whole man, or nearly the whole man, appears ;

and it is easy to spy out faults. One is easily persuaded, for instance, of the truth of what has been said, that he was procrastinating. But it should be added, in extenuation, that writing good novels is harder work than most people have to do. I believe there is scarcely any occupation which calls for as much resolution and self-command as the making of works of art. Business has each day its occasions and necessities, which call out and support the mind. It is easy to do what comes to your hand and must be done. But to go to your study or studio to-day, when it is not necessary that you should go till to-morrow, and there to wrestle with your mind, to produce before it a thought with entire clearness, is a matter of some difficulty. I have no doubt that, had it not been for Thackeray's fault of procrastination, many things in his writings which are now only half done would be well done; many passages that now tend to



mar and weaken his books would have been omitted or written over. And yet I doubt if our pleasure in his writings is greatly disturbed by these imperfections; if the central thoughts are good, and really possess the writer's mind, the imperfections do not do much harm. Then, to that very irresolution and confusion which belong to Thackeray, we owe in great part that peculiar melancholy which he expresses so eloquently. Those qualities which have made against his happiness are the essential ingredients of an entire character, which has gained a large share of the sympathy and attention of the world.



V.

THE CONDITIONS OF DANDYISM.

DANDIES are a class of persons to whom the writers of books have not given their true significance and importance. I find the reason of their importance to be this, that they of all men most believe in that in which all believe to a great extent,—mundane success, and that they of all men best represent it. When wealth and place would be represented, they do not choose as their symbols the old, the feeble, and the disenchanted, but those who, to the advantage of their worldly position, add the native gifts of youth, health, and good looks. The dandy's principle of

existence is belief in the outward life, and a profound agreement with what are called the world's ideas. Indeed, in all the world there are none who believe them so fully as he does; these ideas are his own, and he judges other men by them with a reliance upon their correctness which is implicit. He delights in the sense of being fortunate, he has a good digestion, and finds such zest and occupation in material life that he does not feel the want of other employments. Now, it is obvious that the position which we have here described is an important one. Its occupants, no doubt, change rapidly from hour to hour, for dandyism in the individual is usually but short-lived, but the place itself is one of the strongest in the field of society.

One general condition of the perfect dandy is that he must be at peace with himself. So secure should be that satisfaction, that he should scarcely ever have

need to cast a glance inward or backward upon himself. Another condition is that he should, as a rule, be young. Commerce with life, and an experience of its customary ills, are certain to impair the best dandyism. The man who is busy with the prospects of sons, or the matrimonial perplexities of daughters, must have outlived the dandy's state of mind. Age, indeed, if unaccompanied by disenchantment and the pressure of human ills, is unfavourable to dandyism. The deepening of the social ties must destroy it. The stronger relationships do not consist with it. A bachelor may retain a languishing dandyism till he is gray, but such a sentiment does not agree with the feelings of the parental mind. So much for the general discrepancy of age and dandyism. There is, however, a particular reason why the young are the best dandies. Along with that unhesitating pride in the bare fact of possession which is a characteristic of the

dandy, there goes a secure faith that his good fortune is the result of his own merit. All men, indeed, believe, to a greater or less extent, that their good fortune is the result of their own merit, but none believe this with so unquestioning a faith as the young. The contrary notion never crosses their minds except as some threadbare commonplace, drowsily announced from the preacher's desk, which has about as much application to themselves as most of the stories in the Old Testament. There is one other quality necessary to the constitution of the perfect dandy, and which, we believe, completes him. This quality is a purely personal one. It is a certain native self-conceit and force of will.

If it is necessary that the dandy should possess these qualifications, it is not less necessary that he should be without certain others. He should, as a rule, not be a man of ability. This is necessary not only because the knowledge and mental

energy which accompany ability are likely to impair the dandiacal mind, but also for another reason. One cause of the respect which the dandy receives is that his mind is difficult to comprehend and to define. The chief mental characteristic in the true dandy is a certain determination and self-confidence; for the rest, his mind has little in it; and it is difficult to grasp with precision a mind which is without thought and almost without traits. It is, on the other hand, easier to judge a man who, to a disposition toward dandyism, adds ability and distinction, because he presents to the tentacles of criticism something which may be seized and defined. Ability, moreover, implies the disposition to do something, and to learn what should be done. This disposition is exactly the reverse of the dandy's, which is one of rest and content. But of all men of ability it is most difficult for the artist (we use the word in its broad sense) to be



a dandy. The dandy is independent ; the artist's characteristic is his dependence. He never ceases to need sympathy and recognition. The dandy compels you to be what he thinks you ; the artist is always what you think him. The prominence or violence of the trait varies greatly in different men ; but there is no doubt that it is a characteristic of all artists. In several of the letters of Byron reference is made to a visit paid him in Italy by a young gentleman from Boston, who had brought him a note of introduction, and who had been at no pains to conceal the fact that he was disappointed in the poet. So disturbed is Byron by this, that he again and again refers to the visit, and expresses his regret and vexation at the impression he had made on the mind of this youngster, and the contrition he feels because he cannot always be up to the mark of people's expectations.

The true dandy, we may add, is usually

a very genuine, straightforward, and simple being. The presence of affectation in the manner of any youth shows him to be something less than the perfect dandy. He may be cleverer, he may be kinder ; his quickness of mind and feeling is no doubt the cause of his failure ; but he is not the true dandy. The fact is, perhaps, that the real dandy is a rarer being than we suppose—that the men who have just the gifts and just the want of gifts to act the character in its perfection are not many. They are supplemented by a host of others who like to be in the company of dandies, who sympathise to a great extent with their view of life, and accept it as one of their own. It is these men rather than the true dandies who make the affected tone of fashionable societies, for there can be no doubt that that tone is often affected. It is they who, from table to table, in the coffee-rooms of clubs, conduct those conversational skirmishes which are so like

exercises in *Ollendorff*: "Have you the good sheep of the farmer?" "No; but I have the horse of the excellent grocer."

The dandy should be, in his behaviour, a simple and straightforward being, for his creed is a very simple one. Its simplicity is one of its potent elements. Riches, good connections, etc., are easy to apprehend. There is a definiteness about a large house and a considerable income extremely satisfactory to minds puzzled with the conflicting judgments of men with regard to questions of duty and art. It is so much easier to decide whether a man is rich or great than to choose, amid conflicting opinions, that view of his character or genius which may be the true one. These things are also easy to demonstrate. It was wittily said, by a famous poet, that envy itself could not deny that he lived among the great. The dandy has a faith therefore in which he may confide strongly. Few among men are his equals in faith.

No one but a saint or enthusiast has the same confidence in his spiritual verities which the dandy has in his material verities. But most men are not saints or enthusiasts; their minds pursue through life a varying course of inconstant sentiments, as they are played upon by the contending impulses to which the human career is subject. Hence the effect upon them of the simple faith of the dandy, that men are either rich or poor, brilliant or obscure, fortunate or the reverse, and that all other distinctions which moralists and poets have invented are but the difference between tweedledum and tweedledee.



## VI.

### MR. MATTHEW ARNOLD.

THE essential quality of poetry is music, and this is not an external accident or talent ; the poet feels musically. No matter what the nature of his emotion may be—love, anger, or buoyancy—if it be strong or deep enough, he is conscious of a certain turbulent rhythm or cadence within him. To express this clearly and accurately is one of the great aims of the poet. This is one of Mr. Matthew Arnold's best qualities as an artist. The feeling of nature in him is profound ; but when he comes to the verbal interpretation of it, we frequently notice a certain difficulty of

articulation. His eyes perceive, his lips are fixed to speak, but utterance fails him. We see it in such expressions as "the rustling night air," "the intense, clear, star-sown vault of heaven," and in the frequent use of such adjectives as "cool" and "clear" in descriptions of water. The true, the definite expression, may be said to lie somewhere inside of these. And even where Mr. Arnold is most successful—and he is often nobly successful in his interpretation of nature—the effect is due quite as much to the music as to the words. Here is a passage which illustrates how much words, even the most perfect, owe to the spiritual cadence with which they are imbued. It is from *Sohrab* and *Rustum*, a poem full of those noble scenes which so far transcend the common life that we come to them out of our shallowness and forgetfulness as we might visit other planets. What exultation there is in the line I italicise! I should call it a march,



neither rapid nor slow, but exultant, and with a sense of irresistibleness :—

“ But the majestic River floated on,  
Out of the mist and hum of that low land,  
Into the frosty starlight, and there moved,  
*Rejoicing, through the hushed Chorasmian waste,*  
Under the solitary moon ; he flowed,  
Right for the Polar Star past Orgunjé  
Brimming and bright and large.”

Music is so pervading an essence, that it is sometimes difficult to tell where its province ceases and other virtues begin. Here is a deeper and a sweeter strain :—

“ A while let me with thought have done,  
And as this brimm'd unwrinkled Rhine,  
And that far purple mountain line,  
Lie sweetly in the look divine,  
Of the slow sinking sun.

Ah ! Quiet, all things feel thy balm,  
These blue hills too, this river's flow,  
Were restless once but long ago ;  
Tamed is their turbulent youthful glow,  
Their joy is in their calm.”

In the first of these verses we have the exulting fulness of emotion. The last

contains a subtlety we may not appreciate, and yet do you not perceive the presence of some sweet lingering twilight of feeling? For emotions have their twilights, and when Nature steals away our meditation, she leaves them with us, and they fill us with a pure and misty coolness, subduing slowly every fibre of the spirit. It is some such hour as this that these verses describe. The verbal interpretation is exquisite, but even here it is not so much "the brimm'd unwrinkled Rhine," nor "the purple mountain line:" it is rather the suffusion of his melody about our hearts. He does not present the flowers to our eyes, but the fragrance to our senses, and then the exalted vision perceives with a clearness no word-painting however accurate, can produce.

An energetic discontent pervades Mr. Arnold's poetry. He has, of course, a vast number of things to complain of, which plain people care but little about:

that he was born in an apathetic age, or again that his lot has fallen on a day of doubts and distractions. With one breath he cries for "calm," with the next, he asks "the glow, the thrill of life,—Where, where do these abound?" He takes it ill that Nature has shown him how sweet or how joyous might be the hours spent in her communion, and then has vouchsafed him so few of them. Forced fancies these, the martyrs would say—"moods of fantastic sadness, nothing worth;" yet they are perfectly real and heartfelt; the lament of no exile or dungeon captive was ever more genuine. The truth is that men can get very little idea of proportion in the ills they are liable to. For instance, in any ordinary gradation of calamities, the list would usually be headed by loss of life, or loss of friends, or loss of fortune. Loss of hair would be quite low on the list; yet to a man who is in danger of nothing worse, baldness is a terrible thing.

Poets who know the hostile gods, the cruel stars, and the tragedy of existence, fear it. It is the nature of human apprehension to converge its whole energy upon the particular object which happens to occupy the focus, whether that be martyrdom or the toothache, or a spring without apple blossoms, or a foreign invasion. And this is particularly true of the poet, who frets over some inherent difficulty of his nature or accident of his outward condition that bars him from the sources of inspiration, as though there were no such things as famine and pestilence, as though nobody had ever been strangled, or burnt, or torn to pieces.

Undoubtedly Mr. Arnold's later volume shows a diminution of poetical vitality. The musical emotion now trickles feebly; or to select another image, it is become a kind of widow's cruse, something to watch and to hoard. Yet he has gained in human interest, as we see in *Thyrsis* and *A*

*Southern Night.* There is not in these poems, nor indeed in any others of his, very great range or variety of cadence. Besides the sweeter melodies of which I have spoken, he has only one other strain—the more vigorous music in such poems as *Heine's Grave* and *The Future*. *Rugby Chapel*, which belongs to this class, is at once a poem, a criticism, and rhapsody; it is full of noble feeling, rapt and intense, rising and falling like the strain of a Delphic priestess. There is in it a certain swift oratorical feeling, and the poet appears to have that peculiar characteristic of the orator, a rapid invocation, a sudden, impulsive rush of the spirit.

In some of his poems and essays Mr. Arnold seems to have a creed to advance. He is very eloquent in the expression of his inability to believe in the theology in which he was brought up. He simply cannot believe, and, like all men who know what it is to see clearly, is powerless

to accept formulas which the theorist's poverty of intuition makes easy enough for him. Perhaps, like others, he has tried to construct arguments, and has discovered that years of investigation conduct him only to a barren lip-service, utterly insipid and useless. The ship of Belief we build of oak and iron—every nail is driven in with precision, and from the laying of her keel we watch each moment with solicitude, and then when all is done we walk her decks doubtingly, and again and again test every rivet from prow to helm, and still linger timidly by the shore. Not so the men of other days. A few air lines were hastily put together; a few rapid hammers rang on her weather boarding; her sails were thinner than shadows, her rigging lighter than gossamer,—yet to the eyes of those bold mariners the craft was perfectly seaworthy; with the blithe greetings to the shore and happy singing voices, they weighed anchor; away they swept into



the storm. Mr. Arnold is very familiar with this thought, and has expressed it with great beauty. As the propounder of a gospel of his own, however, he does not inspire us with confidence ; he has hardly the faith of a teacher, although he may be approximating to that condition, as parallel lines are said to converge at infinity. At present the men are very few indeed who seem able to teach. Our teachers assume the proper Stoic tone of authority, are properly bearded and properly barefooted ; they have a porch to walk under, and so on. But when they have opened their mouths then it is that we begin to perceive how unlike they are to those of the past. With all their facial seriousness, try as hard as they may, poor men, they cannot be teachers. Indeed, we think they often go to teaching as a means of inducing in themselves a condition of faith, and hope that by saying things over and over they will after a while come to believe them.

The above remarks were written many years ago. It is difficult in later years to form an opinion of poetry which you have very much admired in your school or college days. At that time of life I knew Mr. Arnold's poetry by heart. I admired the whole of it ; I of course admired that which I understood ; but I admired still more that which I did not understand. I say it is hard to know just what to think of poetry which one has read with admiration as a boy ; but the above opinions written many years ago seem to me to be correct enough, except where I seem to doubt Mr. Arnold's authority as a teacher and his confidence in his own precepts, and to disparage the authority of modern teachers in general. No seer or prophet of the past, who may have led armies and taken cities, ever had a more entire belief in his religion than a modern poet may have in the truth

of such a subtlety as that of the relation between morality and nature. Such a writer as Mr. Arnold has almost a material sense of the moral distinctions which he inculcates ; they are things which he can nearly see and touch.

Mr. Arnold is indeed a writer who speaks with a great deal of authority. He has a strong, positive spirit. The strength of that positive spirit is all the more evident from the fact that it has been hindered by that sympathetic discouragement of which he so often speaks. His mind has been very open to impressions from certain authors, and, indeed, from men in general. And it appears to have been his disposition to regard others as more enviable than himself. Even where these others are far from fortunate, he seems to admire the distinction of their unhappiness. His general habit seems to have been to regard others as more brilliant and successful than himself. He admires the "young lions"

of the daily press, who will write you a column in two hours and a quarter without, through the whole length of it, snagging their minds upon a single scruple. He admires the practical men. He is very conscious of this disposition, and often speaks of it. But he does not seem, as is natural, to have been equally conscious of the high degree to which he has been favoured with a positive and aggressive disposition. It is, nevertheless, this quality in Mr. Arnold's mind which has the last word. Discouragement may momentarily retard or depress it, but, like a cork in water, it is sure to come to the surface.

This quality, it is true, has undergone some alterations during his career. It appears in a very marked way in his early poems. I scarcely know any things which exhibit to such a degree that truculent nobility of youth which, whether fortunate and clear, as in his case, or blind and wilful, as in other cases, is so great a power.

The truculence, and perhaps the force, of his early writings, it is true, we see abated in his later ones ; but the truculence has been corrected by an increased acquaintance with life, and some diminution of force is apt to accompany increased years and wider knowledge. His later confidence has the strength of habit, and that accruing from many reaffirmations of his best youthful perceptions.

This constitutional confidence was of great artistic use to him in his younger days. The charming poems which he wrote at that period appear, many of them, and some of the best, to have been regarded by the poet himself quite as much as statements of truth as expressions of art. Consciously, the poet seems bent upon expounding a perception. In the following beautiful lines the poet, though most melodious and picturesque, seems mainly bent upon being didactic.

“Yes : in the sea of life enisld,  
With echoing straits between us thrown,  
Dotting the shoreless watery wild,  
We mortal millions live alone.

The islands feel the enclasping flow,  
And then their endless bounds they know.

But when the moon their hollows lights,  
And they are swept by balms of spring,  
And in their glens, on starry nights,  
The nightingales divinely sing,  
And lovely notes from shore to shore,  
Across the sounds and channels pour ;

Oh, then a longing like despair  
Is to their farthest caverns sent ;  
—For surely once they feel we were  
Parts of a single continent.  
Now round us spreads the watery plain—  
Oh might our marges meet again !”

The proposition herein expressed when reduced to prose—if, indeed, anything so delicate be thus reducible—would make a particularly poor figure by the side of this poem. It may be true, or it may not, but at any rate the author, at a time when the muse was at hand, had a fortunate confi-



dence in it, and hence a beautiful poem. The same may be said of the following :—

“What girl  
Now reads in her bosom as clear  
As Rebekah read, when she sate  
At eve by the palm-shaded well?  
Who guards in her breast  
As deep, as pellucid, a spring  
Of feeling, as tranquil, as sure?”

This may be true. But it is not at all important whether a young lady of the present day has or has not the qualities here ascribed to Rebekah. Perhaps she has, perhaps not. It makes little difference which. But Mr. Arnold thought this when a young man, and expressed it in a cadence, into which he has infused an exquisite pensive quiet. Of course, in prose abstract truth is more important than in poetry. In critical writing it is essential. But it sometimes happens that in Mr. Arnold's critical essays we come across a passage, the effect of which upon the mind is mainly due to its being artistically expressed, and

the absolute truth of which may be disputed. Take the following sentence with which he concludes his admirable essay upon Heine :—

“That is what I say ; there is so much power, so many seem able to run well, so many give promise of running well ; so few reach the goal, so few are chosen. Many are called, few are chosen.”

What is new and taking in the thought of this passage is hardly true. It is this, that the man who is to “run,” shall have to begin with a great original genius, that he shall have also learning and high culture, that he shall be virtuous ; having done all this, he shall proceed to “run.” Surely this will not do as a suggestion of a possible plan upon which to make a writer. The course which nature has always pursued, and doubtless always will pursue, which has been to turn the imperfections of men to account as well as their virtues, is better. Everybody knows that artists are assisted as much by their

defects as by their gifts. Take the case of Byron, mentioned in this passage as one, who, if he had had culture and virtue, might have "run." Suppose him to have been a good man, suppose him to have been a scrupulous man, suppose his mind to have been deeply imbued with the feeling expressed by Dr. Watts, that "there's not a wicked word we say, but in God's dreadful book 'tis writ against the Judgment Day,"—he would not have run at all; he would have stood still. Had he been a wise man, with a wide knowledge of human experience, would he have thought it worth while to celebrate in passionate song the exploits of outlaws? A writer made by the plan indicated in this passage could not be said so much to "run" as to resemble that Dutch tumbler who took a start of three miles to jump a hill, but was so out of breath when he reached it, that he had to rest, and then walk over it. But Mr. Arnold's thought

has that novelty which the reader likes ; the words imitate artistically the rise and movement of the thought in the mind, and the passage is further the expression of an interesting literary personage.

But it hardly need be said that one of Mr. Arnold's most important traits is his truthfulness. He has an intrepid intelligence. His habit has been to consult his consciousness, to be very determined in seeing what he really found there, and in declaring it when found. This quality appears continually in his writings. We see it, for instance, when he tells us that the value of a day will often depend upon whether one has read something that day except the newspapers. We see it again when he tells us that inequality has a depressing effect upon the mind ; few persons, by the way, could have said this so effectively and with such propriety. He is even ready to be truthful at the risk of being commonplace, trivial, or feeble.

There is in his early volume a poem called "Consolation." It is full of charming images, but the thought of the poem, namely, that at any one time many people in the world are doing many different things, that some are happy and some are unhappy, and that each must have a share of happiness and unhappiness, seems almost too obvious to say. He published a few years ago, in one of the magazines, a poem upon a domestic subject. I heard it at the time of its publication spoken of by some persons as too slight and commonplace. To me it seemed charming. It was the work of one to whom the visits of the muse are few and far between; there are, however, certain human sources of sensibility left him, and to one of these he has recourse. He will not write unless he has a substantial poetical thought to express. It would be well if all poets knew equally well when not to speak. There are some of them who get to think

everything of value which comes into their heads ; they mistake the idle reverberations of their empty minds for muttered thunder, and they go on for years filling their lungs with great words which have little in them. But Mr. Arnold is too clear-sighted to deceive himself in this way. Then he is very fortunate in having, when fancy and feeling are not present, such a fine critical mind to retreat upon. The perceptions may always be active, and in these he lives. He is thus always advancing.

His perceptions, it has been said, are very intrepid and candid. He has no system, and is ready to recognise a truth wherever he sees it. Not that he is not disposed sometimes to carry his prepossessions too far. For instance, I believe that he has favoured banishing the poetry of Goldsmith from the reading-books of school children. This wish is due, I suppose, to his dislike, with which I do not



quarrel, of the measure in which they are written. The measure may be artificial and unpoetical; but in selecting poetry for children, it is mainly necessary, as Mr. Arnold would himself say, to take that which will reach them, which will awake a sense of poetry in their minds. That should be chosen, no matter what the measure in which it is written. Now I am sure that Goldsmith's poetry has this property. Individual testimony is always of value in such a matter. I remember that the first poems which my father placed in my hands were the *Traveller* and the *Deserted Village*. The earliest poetical impression of which I have a distinct recollection—that of a deserted garden—I received from the lines:—

“Near yonder copse where once the garden smil'd,  
And still where many a garden flower grows wild.”

And two or three years ago, when I went to Switzerland for the first time, one of the pleasantest anticipations which I took

with me was, that I should imitate the *Traveller*—

“And, plac’d on high above the storm’s career,  
Look downward where an hundred realms appear.”

The charm of these works is in their transparent and familiar spirit,—in their being so near to the general experience. Mr. Arnold is himself, perhaps, of a genius somewhat remote and peculiar, and has not that cosy neighbourhood to the common mind which was the quality of Goldsmith. Does he not also carry a prepossession too far in what he has written with regard to the Burials Bill • which was before the English Legislature a few years ago. It is very well to assert that people who make prayers in public should conform to a ritual, and that when left to themselves they are sure to commit some vulgarity; but it is quite another thing to say that when so large and respectable a body as the British Nonconformists wish to bury their dead in the

national churchyards with their own services, they shall not be permitted to do so. In general his political utterances do not appear to be among his most fortunate. His judgment does not appear at its best in the things which he wrote about the position of England in Europe during the decade between 1860 and 1870. It was his opinion that England had not the intelligence to perceive what she should do at that time. As an acute critic of human nature, it was open to him to express his opinion that the English statesmen had not the clear intelligence of those of the Continent. But he does not make it plain what he would have had England do at this time. Something else than knowledge of human nature is necessary if one is to propound opinions upon such a subject,—one must be acquainted with a lot of Blue Books ; and I am sure that Mr. Arnold has better use for his time than the incessant perusal of Blue Books.

About this time he took up a humorous style of writing. He was successful in this. His clear perceptions gave value to his ironical description of the minds of certain persons and classes. He has the clearness of satire without its bitterness. But his jokes are sometimes mistaken, and he does well to limit himself in this direction. What Mr. Arnold is too wise to do, such a writer as De Quincey does incessantly. Indeed, there is no kind of writing in which men are more likely to be mistaken than in that humour which intends to combine fancy with intellectual perception. It is different with a poetical thought. The author is usually able to know whether his poetical thought has value or not. But in humorous writing the author's mind is susceptible to a false activity, the mistake of which the reader may see at a glance, but which the writer cannot see. He fancies that he sees a substantial light, when he is really pursuing

some watery Will-o'-the-Wisp moving in the recesses of the forest and shining diffusely over the ebony morasses.

If, as has been intimated, Mr. Arnold has not the requisite aptitude and knowledge for political discussion, in the field of literary criticism he combines intelligence with aptitude and extended knowledge. His interest appears to be in the mind of authors rather than in their productions; and in describing these authors his habit is to look directly at their minds and to describe what he sees. But his interest in these authors even appears to be secondary to his interest in the qualities of mind which make up literature. He sees these qualities very clearly—perhaps because he himself remembers them—and has been very happy in giving them names. He sees a virtue almost as clearly as he sees a fault. It is hardly possible, however, that the critic may see a virtue quite as clearly as he

can see a fault. Sainte Beuve has said of himself that his praise was "exterior" and his blame "interior," by which he no doubt meant that his praise was less sincere and sure than his blame, and that he took a keener relish in blaming than praising. Blame may be more sure than praise, because the critic may see what is faulty more surely than what is good. Of what is imperfect or unsound, the critic may see the whole; his imagination may seize it securely. He may, as it were, draw a line around it. But of the mind of a great author, while in a high state of exercise, he may be said only to see the hither side, to get rather a suggestion than to grasp the whole. Sainte Beuve's implied confession that he took a keener relish in blame than praise sounds wicked, and I have seen it commented upon with horror; but it is merely a stroke of friendly candour on the writer's part and the statement of a necessary



truth. It is in a sense necessary that a critic shall find keener relish in blaming than praising. Pleasure is in proportion to activity, and blame is more active than praise. When you read a thoroughly great work, such, for instance, as the *Sorrows of Werther* or Burke's speech upon *Conciliation with America*, you are delighted and illuminated ; but is not your mind supine and passive ? You look upward at the work with pleasure, indeed, but with a sense of languor. And the attitude of the mind in defining such a work will be passive. But so soon as the critic has to define anything unsound or imperfect, his mind at once becomes tense and active.

In his writings upon other than literary subjects, Mr. Arnold is better the nearer he keeps to the description of human nature. His immediate perceptions are profound ; his inferences not so satisfactory. I think, for instance, one sees

this in his writings upon religious subjects. These writings are rather in the way of discovery and examination than hortatory and practical.

Mr. Arnold's writings have been widely read here. They have a natural relationship to this country. He is an admirer of democracy, and has thought a great deal about the future of human character and society. His interest in the future is indeed one of his peculiarities. It is indeed surprising, considering how much is thought and said about the past, how little is thought and said about the future. Human society, I take it, must continue to exist on this planet for a long time to come, and must exist under certain conditions. Just as certainly as there was a 1782 there will be a 2082. But few people appear to believe that there is going to be any future. Mr. Arnold, however, has kept this in mind. But he is not at all a visionary. In his guesses

concerning what may, and should be, the directions of men's minds and of society for the future, there is a great deal of reality. Take, for instance, his inculcation of sweetness, for which he has had to endure some laughter. The disposition which he holds up for imitation, which looks around upon everybody with a benevolent approbation which is half the result of its own happiness and half of the beauty of the minds of others, is an actual one. I say that he has had to endure some laughter, but nothing very serious. It is impossible to offer hostile opposition or even derision to one who uses his weapons or, I should rather say, who has his spirit; his intentions are so entirely pure; his amiability and charity so evidently unaffected.

In his advocacy of democracy he has usually taken France for his example. Of this country he does not know much. I do not think that his remark that the

Atlantic Cable has a Philistine at each end of it is a just one. It is not fair that the Philistines of the two countries should be confused. In so far as an American is a Philistine at all, his Philistinism is accidental and ignorant. He is an amiable being. You may go into his camp; he will let you play with his spear and helmet. He errs solely through ignorance, and is very teachable. Your way of thinking may be a little beyond him, perhaps, but he would not oppose you. Now, Mr. Arnold would no doubt assure us that the quality of an English Philistine is a certain angry resistance to everything which he does not comprehend. There are traces, too, that he does not understand the distinctive character of the people of this country. He does not understand that we have one. I do not believe that there is any country in the world, which has a more distinct type of individual character than the United States. I know the

reverse of this is the common opinion abroad. Lord Beaconsfield said that there is nothing in our manners original and indigenous. Very well, if we select the best of all other peoples and nations, perhaps we need not fret on account of our want of originality. But the common opinion abroad is not true. There is a great deal that is original in the individual American character. What is peculiar in that character does not lie upon the surface, and, I think, is too delicate for the comprehension of the foreigner. It is best understood and quickest recognised by Americans themselves. There may be nothing in his speech, nothing in his accent, manner, dress, or mien to distinguish him, but you may quickly recognise the man whose mind has received the social education of this country.

In conclusion, I would say that the example of Mr. Arnold's unconventional and persistent truthfulness is needed in

this country. It does not seem to me that truthfulness is the especial characteristic of our literature. I mean, of course, that truthfulness which is a mental rather than a moral trait, that intense veracity which we attribute to the recluse. Are not American writers under a peculiar temptation to be self-conscious and affected? Do not they think too much of what they would wish to appear to say? The distinguished writer is apt to be made conceited by the indiscriminating praise bestowed upon him. In the solitude of his study he preens himself, and at the end of the sentence which he has just written asks, not solely whether it be true, but also whether he would wish to appear thus to his admirers. The unknown writer, on the other hand, suffers from a different temptation. He is too much afraid of contradicting the popular opinion. Certainly a young writer in this country shows a curious indisposition to dissent



from popular provincial notions regarding even such matters as literature and art. He is in danger of sharing that fear of the public which has been so often called an American trait. Hence Mr. Arnold's example is needed here.

In looking over this paper, I see that I have not done justice to my own sense of Mr. Arnold's genius, character, and services, to the admiration I have of the sweetness, beauty, and distinction of his verse, of his original critical intellect, and especially of his potent example, of the wisdom and "prevailing force" with which his career has been pursued, and which have made that career so beneficent and thoroughly successful.



## VII.

### A DAY OR TWO IN SUSSEX.

I FIND that the real use of an English country house is the cultivation amid pleasant material conditions of a salutary repose. A foreigner is perhaps not likely to appreciate this at first ; he may think that he is under some obligation to try to make himself amusing ; he quickly discovers that this is not so. The guests sit down to breakfast with the knowledge that they are to be all day together and there is no hurry to talk. Then one does not feel the need of conversation, if, as is often the case, one finds some pretty people about one. If the house happens to be

full of young people, one is sufficiently employed at breakfast in looking at them, for the complexions which flourish in this country appear to advantage in the morning. The thick bloom is actually thrown upon the faces of these girls, the colour bathing the temples and rushing downwards in eccentric waves over the throat and chin. Then the hair is so bright and strong. When I was young I never noticed the hair of young people. Why, is it, I wonder, that when one's own locks become few and dingy one begins to derive such exquisite pleasure from seeing heads of fresh and abundant brown hair?

Fifield, near which I was staying some time ago, is a very pretty village in Sussex, and lies in the midst of a highly cultivated and beautiful country. I was at a house not half a mile from the village, and I walked thither at least three times a day. Though I knew I should have no letters,

I went to the post-office and demanded them; and I was a great deal about the streets.

The morning hours are the best to spend in walking about a village, and watching the village sights. It is wonderful how long a time three days is in a village; on how many village matters in that time one may form, correct, and re-form opinions. I got to know by sight if not by name the tradesmen, the parsons, two or three of the village eccentrics, and a number of the neighbours. The neighbours are a great deal in the village. They come to attend the sessions, or to see the grocer and the butcher, or perhaps more commonly to make the haunt of "social men" the object of a morning's ride. Properly to estimate the felicity of the condition of an English country gentleman, one must see him ride into a village near his estate on a pleasant summer morning. His advent produces a noticeable impression in the village street.

Not that people are over ready with flatteries and attentions; but everybody he meets or has occasion to speak to is very civil, and he feels himself the object of a general, if silent, interest and respect. Meanwhile the object of this homage is on no account obliged to support his dignity by dressing himself in a high hat and a black coat. On the contrary, his trousers are perhaps thrust in his boots; he wears a rusty shooting-jacket, and covers his head with an old soft hat. These old clothes, taken together with the public respect for their occupant, and with the fine animal on which he is mounted, give an impression of enviable liberty and of thorough delight and satisfaction in life, which I believe not to be in the least exaggerated.

On market days the gentlemen who are magistrates come to the village to sit at the Petty Sessions. The Petty Sessions at Fifield were held in a large room in

the Royal Sussex, the chief tavern of the village; I went one morning and found the room filled with prisoners and their friends. A few idle and pleasant-looking young fellows, sons of gentlemen, sat near the magistrates and seemed to derive considerable amusement from the proceedings. The magistrates, of whom there were perhaps half a dozen, sat on a bench behind a rude, unpainted wooden table. I noticed one gentleman among them who has had to do, during certain recent complications, with matters much graver than the administration of justice upon the lesser delinquents of Fifield. I heard but one case. A boy of fourteen charged a wooden-looking rustic (who, with a nervous stare and an extremely pale countenance, sat awaiting his fate) with having knocked him down and beaten him. The clerk, a person with an important and vulgar air, repeated to the man the charge and evidence of the boy. It became evi-



dent in the course of the examination that the boy had been impertinent and had even offered some violence to the man, who had given him a beating which was severe perhaps, but not much more severe than he had deserved. The decision of the magistrates was that there should be no fine, but that the man should pay the costs, which were some twenty-five shillings. I then left, persuaded that the judgment rendered had been substantially just, and admiring the untechnical and common-sense methods by which it had been obtained.

I doubt if it would be possible to find an individual of American birth so much like a stock or a stone as this man. One has to see people of this grade of life in Europe to understand how much has been done for the descendants of this class in the United States by American well-being and equality. It is likely that many a sprightly fellow now running about the streets of an American town is descended,

and at no great distance, from just such a being as this. Indeed, when we consider the stagnation in which the poor remain from generation to generation in Europe, it is surprising how rapidly American society gets them on. It seems that a generation or two will make a good result out of almost any material. If, for instance, Mr. Huxley should succeed in making his protoplactic man,—should once get him well upon his legs,—I do not doubt that the effect of American education upon him would be satisfactory. His introduction to society should take place in the United States. Let him catch the sentiment of democratic institutions in the corridors of our hotels; let him have the advantage of a few months reading of the New York papers; I have no doubt that he would shortly be a valuable member of the community.

If the morning hours are the best to spend in watching village society, village scenery is never so charming as at the

close of the day. Fifield lies on the side and summit of rather a steep hill, its main street winding in the shape of a letter S. One afternoon, as I passed through this street on my way to take my accustomed walk before sundown, I thought the village presented a singularly charming appearance. The clean ascending street was full of the beautiful reflections of the approaching sunset ; the old brick houses and pretty cottages lay in a gentle light, while even the post-office and the modern apothecary shop, with its plate-glass windows, were exquisitely illumined. During these walks, for the first time in my life I have really liked English scenery. An American, instead of getting to admire English scenery by seeing much of it, is, I think, apt to like it less and less the longer he is in England. That, at least, has been my case. At first one is pleased with the pretty little fields, the green hedges, the landscape swept and garnished like a lawn ;

but there succeeds, after a while, a deep longing for the scenery of his native country. The scenery of the Old World begins to produce in his mind a feeling of irritation. The excess of art and cultivation he feels to be a sort of impurity, which he would like to rub away from the surface of the country. He remembers with passion how clean are the beds of gum and sycamore, where sweep the waters of his native wilderness ; how pure are the dusty roads, climbing the great hills and lined with scorched blackberry-vines ; how vast and worthy of worship are the landscapes of the poorest and harshest parts of his continent. But at Fifield, for the first time since being in England, did I sincerely like English scenery, and was I conscious of something really medicinal in it. And yet Fifield is the most English scenery that I have seen. It is the country of the curfew and the lowing herds. The landscape, as I viewed it from a hill

near the village, was small, green, trim, shaded and scented with the breath of kine. Certainly I never before sufficiently observed how sweet and powerful a perfume is the breath of kine, so much talked of by the poets. There were only half a dozen cows, and they were in the next field, yet, with their sighs and breathings, they appeared to scent the whole atmosphere of Fifield.

One turns reluctantly from this fragrant and deeply verdant solitude, but one must turn sharply ; for even in these shortened August days the dinner-hour interrupts the twilight, and one must hasten home to extinguish one's sentiment in a plate of soup that is served promptly at eight. In a half-hour's time you are at a London dinner, for such the dinner in a country-house is. The house which I have been describing I had the luck, not very common in England, to find full of young people. Some Fifield people, however, have been

asked in, among them the vicar's wife, to whom I sit next, and to whom I find it my business to talk ; but it is hard to do so, because I sit opposite Dolores, a Spanish, or half Spanish, girl of fifteen, who is a beauty. The beauty of Dolores is peculiar; she has a nose I never expected to see on such a pretty girl or on such a young one. I had an impression that such extremely aquiline noses were put on later in life. She has an exquisite colour, large, dark, and perpetually shining eyes, and eyelashes about an inch and a half long, just like those of Spanish young ladies I remember seeing in pictures in the New York *Ledger*. Under these eyelashes this light and thin and most Roman nose juts out with surprising boldness, and yet with most fascinating and original perfection and fortunate agreement with the eyes and eyelashes, the dip of the cheek and chin, and the somnolent and somewhat childish expression.





## VIII.

### TWO POEMS OF COLLINS.

ONE Sunday afternoon I went with a friend to dine at Richmond. We did not go to the Star and Garter, which was being repaired at that time, and was closed, but to a hotel the name of which I have forgotten. It is a low, white building in a pretty situation, nearer to the station than the Star and Garter, and I counsel the reader who visits Richmond, should he recognise the place by this description, by all means to pass by. It was about the first of June, and the long lines of people going up from the station,

and standing about in the fields, had a deadly holiday aspect, like flowers at a funeral. We went into the hotel and ordered dinner, which was long in coming, and was very bad. The hour was perhaps seven, but so long is the English June evening that nobody had yet begun to dream of sundown. A half dozen young Moussiers were chattering together at one of the tables. Near us were two very young guardsmen, charming English youths, fresh from the public schools, and getting their first taste of the sins and pleasures of the town. Other youths, evident imitators, were not far off. One, a most diminutive person, sat just opposite with a Herculean actress of the Gaiety Theatre. The May-trees bowered on the hillsides far and near. The doors and windows were open, and the odours from their white masses pervaded the hall, mixed with the perfumes of the garden plots. The strong sun was still drawing fragrant and powerful earthy

odours from the sod. There was much swearing at the waiters, who were running about very fast ; the air was very sweet ; the Thames beneath us ran away rapidly to the town ; there was a great rattling of plates and jingling of glasses.

The dinner was bad, as I say, and we quarrelled with the waiter about the bill. The proprietor was summoned, a young gentleman in a perfect frock coat ; we called him a great many hard names, addressed him as "waiter," threatened to write to the *Times*, and paid the bill, knowing that we had got much the worst of it, and not at all believing that we should ever write to the *Times*. I left my friend and walked into the lawn very much out of temper. The air was so fragrant, the scene without so lovely, gentle, strange, and Sabbatic, as to impart more of pain than pleasure. It was now getting late, and I was about to make my way back to town, when I remembered that at Rich-

mond Church, which was but a few steps away, the grave of Thomson was to be seen, and I might have recalled the curse which the sweetest of the English poets of the last century had invoked upon one who should neglect it :—

“ Yet lives there one whose heedless eye  
Shall scorn thy pale shrine glimmering near ?  
For him, sweet bard, may Fancy die,  
And Joy desert the blooming year.”

I cared little, of course, for Thomson and his poetry, but from him whose poems have preserved more faithfully than any others of the time the spirit of the English landscape, I could not but fear this gentle imprecation. Either here in person, or with this spot and some such hour as this in mind, Collins had written his *Ode on the Death of Thomson* ; and where shall we find verses in which nature and evening are more sweetly expressed, and poetic feeling more perfectly imitated ?

“ Remembrance oft shall haunt the shore  
 When Thames in summer wreaths is dressed,  
 And oft suspend the dashing oar,  
 To bid his gentle spirit rest.

And oft, as ease and health retire,  
 To breezy lawn or forest deep,  
 The friend shall view yon whitening spire,  
 And 'mid the varied landscape weep.

But thou, who own'st that earthy bed,  
 Ah ! what will every dirge avail,  
 Or tears which Love and Pity shed,  
 That mourn beneath the gliding sail ?”

How well does the following stanza express the grateful return of the poet to the world from this scene of reflection and emotion !

“ But thou, lone stream, whose sullen tide  
 No sedge-crowned sisters now attend,  
 Now waft me from the green hill's side,  
 Whose cold turf hides the buried friend.”

And how well does this describe his turning, as one will do in leaving such a scene, for a last view of the place amid the gathering shades :—

“ And see the fairy valleys fade ;  
Dun night has veiled the solemn view !  
Yet once again, dear parted shade,  
Meek Nature’s child, again adieu !”

What a notion it gives us of the power of poetry, that this poor madhouse patient is able, at the distance of more than a hundred years, to so possess our minds with his own emotion, that we never cease to see amid the skirts of these dim woodlands his retreating figure !

There is one other poem of Collins in which the expression of natural scenery is even more remarkable—the *Ode to Evening*. In this poem Collins has used a rhymeless lyric stanza common to the Latin, but which has seldom, if ever, been well handled by an English writer. So perfect is the music of this ode that one might read it many times before discerning that it contains no rhymes. The purity, the melody, the sedate elegance of this poem it would be hard to find ex-



celled. It is the strong and easy result of those long years of worship of nature—of those repeated hours of feeling and meditation—by which the soul is formed ; the lines, with all their classic grace, their sweet imitation of antique themes and symbols in phrases, having an ivory polish and a melody which steals upon the ear with the softness of the mist, are yet profoundly personal, and graven deeply with the pen of experience. I wonder that some musician of genius has not chanted them !

“ Then let me rove some wild and heathy scene,  
Or find some ruin 'midst its dreary dells,  
Whose walls more awful nod  
By thy religious gleams.

Or, if chill, blustering winds, or driving rain  
Prevent my willing feet, be mine the hut  
That, from the mountain's side,  
Views wilds and swelling floods,

And hamlets brown and dim-discovered spires ;  
And hears their simple bell, and marks o'er all  
Thy dewy fingers draw  
The gradual dusky veil.”

But a half dozen stories remain of this poet. In one he appears as a young fellow fresh from the University, and eager for the town. Gaily dressed, and with a feather in his hat, he calls upon the agent of his rich uncle, who tells him that his appearance is by no means that of a young man without a guinea he can call his own. We have also a story of his having been enamoured of a young lady, to whom he wrote a beautiful poem upon the death of her lover in the action of Fontenoy; this young lady was a day older than himself, and he used to say that he came into the world a day after the fair. Again, we know that just before his confinement in an asylum for lunatics, Dr. Johnson went to see him in Islington. "There was nothing," said Johnson, "of disorder discernible in his mind by any but himself." He had withdrawn from study, and travelled with no other book than an English Testament, such as chil-

dren carry to school. Johnson, curious to see what it was, took it into his hand. "I have but one book," said Collins, "but that is the best."

We think, unreasonably enough, in reading these stories, how strange it is that people a hundred years ago should have been at such pains to be happy, should have laid such schemes of amusement, wealth, respect, and long life. We say that life is short, and yet while we live life is long, its periods remote and far apart, and age and misfortune distant. But in reflecting upon a departed life, we lose all notion of continuous living, of succeeding days and months. The colours of death and coming disaster appear through the woof of health, youth, and happiness. Cypress and myrtle are mixed together in the same heap. We know that the author of these poems came once to London, caring for fine dresses and the gay world; we know, too, that he was for

a while the inmate of a madhouse ; these and a few more facts we have. The box, at the bottom of which they lie confused and mixed, we reverse, and they lie before us, the sole relics of a man of uncommon genius and merit, the only remains of many years of thought, joy, hope, and misery.



## IX.

### WILLIAM CULLEN BRYANT.<sup>1</sup>

IT was said in some of the biographical notices of Mr. Bryant which appeared in the London papers at the time of his death, that his poetry was nearly as well known in this country as in America. It seems to me, on the contrary, that very little is known here either of Mr. Bryant's poetry or of his career. There are two characters in which he has been known to his countrymen. He has been for half a century and more intimately known by them as a poet; but to the present generation he has appeared also in another character.

<sup>1</sup> Published in *Macmillan's Magazine*.

He was known to the later generation as a good, wise, and venerable man, who through a long life had so practised his various abilities and virtues, as to have attained distinction in several pursuits, and to have succeeded in his old age to well-deserved rewards and honours. As a poet Mr. Bryant is little known in this country ; in that other character in which, as I have said, he is familiar to the present generation of his own countrymen, he is scarcely known at all here.

Mr. Bryant was known to his countrymen mainly as a poet of nature. He was one of those poets who give themselves almost wholly to nature. His mind was immured in it ; his strong eye was riveted upon it ; his powerful attention was possessed by it. He rarely attempts to write upon a subject of which natural scenery is not two-thirds of the attraction for him. In the *Song of Marion's Men* he gives a charming account of the life led by a



band of guerillas in South Carolina during the revolutionary war, but he is mainly attracted to this subject because of his love of thinking upon the wilderness. He writes :—

“ We know the forest round us  
As seamen know the sea.”

In writing philosophical or patriotic poems, he is always throwing upon the page some epithet descriptive of one of the scenes of nature with which his imagination is filled, as, for instance, when he calls upon soldiers for the war to come from “the earth-o’er-looking mountains.” Even in those poems in which he attempts to tell a story, he must always place his story by the roadside, or the riverside, or in the forest. His stories, indeed, are rather more of shadows than of persons, the main beauty of them as stories being the grace with which he prevents them from being personal.

The poems of Mr. Bryant which are

best known, such as *The Water-fowl*, *The Fringed Gentian*, and *The Yellow Violet*, exhibit his genius as a describer of nature. *The Water-fowl* was written in 1815—he did not remember where. I have heard him say that once when he was taking a walk near Plymouth, Massachusetts, where he was then a law student, he saw a water-fowl flying in the distance, and that this incident was the occasion of the poem. But he did not remember whether he wrote it at Plymouth, or carried the scene and the thought in his mind, and wrote it a few months later when he had gone back to Western Massachusetts. This poem, *The Fringed Gentian*, and *The Yellow Violet* are perhaps known here, but I think they are not so well known as they ought to be. Their beauty must strike any one, but is particularly apparent to those who know the scenery of the part of the world in which they were written.

The far greater popularity of Bryant's poems in America than in England may be in a part explained by the fact that they describe scenery which is, of course, better known to Americans than to others. There are great diversities of scenery in the United States. The mountains of Vermont and New Hampshire have the hoary aspect of the north. The slopes of the Alleghanies, as they appear in Virginia and Pennsylvania, have the softer, deeper verdure which belongs to a climate more mild and a soil more liberal. The occupations to which the nature of the various regions compels the industry of men of themselves modify the landscape. Parts of New England and many regions of the other States are grazing rather than farming regions. The green and rocky earth, with orchards upon the hillsides, and the highest eminences covered with the brush and the forests, can hardly show a single field of grain. From such a country the

change is great to a landscape like the Cove Valley of Pennsylvania. There, in a great plain, twelve miles across and surrounded by a circle of blue mountains, one vast harvest-field waves in the mid-day sun. (I remember,—how could I forget it?—crossing this valley once in an old cart, drawn by a mule and a lame horse of unequal sizes, harnessed mostly with rope, and driven by a boy who beat the mule with a switch, but who could only with the greatest difficulty impel his team into a trot. The only other passenger was a fat old countrywoman. Our road lay through leagues of harvest, and under a sky of Elysian blue. It was through such a scene as this that we limped along—or rather, floated like the chariot of Phœbus Apollo.) Then there are the clean glades and rich plains of Kentucky and Tennessee. Even these are the diversities of but a single corner of the country. Mr. Bryant's poetry describes New England, a region which

is at once rude and pretty. The general character of the country is sterile and hard, but it is very broken, and is thus full of little green nooks, each with its own stream of fresh water. His poetry has both the severity and the brightness of such scenery. I am not sure that it has not something of its hardness. Perhaps, if he had had the Susquehanna to write about, his verse might have taken on a richer and a milder hue. But although the scenery which Mr. Bryant describes is that of but a small part of the country, yet there are certain broad marks common to all American scenery, and these appear in his poetry. I think that almost any American, no matter from what part he may be, will on opening Mr. Bryant's poems at once recognise that they describe the scenery of his native country. He is at once in contact with the free mountains, the clear air of America, with the "splendid vicissitudes" of that

climate, and especially with the strength of the spirit of nature yet to be felt in those solitudes.

I do not know that American scenery, or at least that scenery familiar to most Americans, is superior to that of other parts of the world. Indeed, in some particulars, it is, no doubt, less beautiful than that of Europe. For instance, American lakes have always seemed to me somewhatapid ; they have not the poetry of situation of those handfults of sweet water which the Scottish mountains hold apart from the surrounding seas, and they have not those exquisite and unseizable colours which haunt the smaller lakes of Switzerland. But American scenery has one quality which is by far the most important of all the attributes of scenery, and is, indeed, the only necessary one, the undisguised presence of the original power and energy of nature. Strangers in the country have not generally admired the scenery of



the eastern portion of the United States. They really think it frowsy and ragged, rather than sublime, and they sometimes think it tame. But in order to understand scenery, it is often necessary to have seen it, not once, but many times,—to have known it, nor for weeks only or for months, but for years. Indeed, really to know it one should have been born or brought up in the midst of it. It is the familiar rather than the novel in scenery that men like. It is that nature which has been conned in the numberless and forgotten hours of early life, and which is associated with the history of the mind, which is really understood and worshipped. I am not sure, indeed, that the love of certain kinds of scenery may not be inherited. It is, perhaps, to the long habit of generations before them that men owe their passion for the sea or the exultation and astonishment with which they come in sight of the rising and sinking outlines of

blue mountains, and recognise the magic of their airy formations.

How high Mr. Bryant's descriptions of nature should rank has been a matter of discussion. But they certainly contain many fine passages. A few summers ago I was staying in a house which is in the midst of the country of the poet's birth, and in sight of that Monument Mountain about which he has written one of his best poems. In that region the sun indeed pursues a "flaming way," but the discomfort and inconvenience of the heat are paid for by the intimacy with the face of nature into which he leads or drives you. The doors and windows are always open in the evenings. People move about the roads and garden-walks, which are still warm, or in groups in the porches watch the rise of the moon. But one does not easily take a book and sit down to read by the light of a lamp. I remember the surprise and sense of novel beauty with which, when

one evening in this house turning over the leaves of a volume of Bryant's poetry, I came upon these stanzas in his *Hymn to the North Star* :—

“ Day, too, hath many a star  
To grace his gorgeous reign, 'as bright as they ;  
Through the blue fields afar,  
Unseen, they follow in his flaming way :  
Many a bright lingerer, as the eve grows dim,  
Tells what a radiant troop arose and set with him.

And thou dost see them rise,  
Star of the Pole ! and thou dost see them set.  
Alone, in thy cold skies,  
Thou keep'st thy old unmoving station yet,  
Nor join'st the dances of that glittering train,  
Nor dipp'st thy virgin orb in the blue western  
main.”

In judging the merits of Mr. Bryant's natural poetry, it is probable that the future critic will say that it is not the highest but that it is yet high. You do not find such expressions in his poetry as this :—  
“ The cataracts blow their trumpets from the steep.” But then how rare such verse is. I know that it is generally thought

that one of the good qualities of the literature of this century has been the sentiment for and the power of description of nature. It has certainly had the sentiment strongly, but not the power. The works of Wordsworth and Keats excepted, it will not be found that much description of nature reaches a high degree of excellence. Our later poets certainly look at nature. Her images move before their eyes; her scenes are conceived with delight. But in the laboured and carefully selected epithets with which they seek to describe them, how rarely is it that the bright presence of nature really remains. It is, of course, true that the literature of this age is greatly superior in this regard to that of the last century. The English poets of the last century scarcely seemed to look at nature at all. When they wished to describe nature, they went to the library to do it. It is, indeed, curious to find the literature of a whole age wanting in atten-

tion to a subject so great and so near at hand. Could this have been because men in general in that day did not look at nature? Did not people take walks at sunset during the eighteenth century? It is, indeed, possible that in that limited age men may not have been able to look at nature in the bold and familiar manner taught by Shakspeare and Wordsworth. But it could hardly have been that men did not write about nature because they did not see it or think about it. It is scarcely possible that the observation of nature can be a thing dependent upon fashion. It is rather the literary expression of the sentiment of nature than the sentiment itself which has been a matter of fashion. There had been for many years nobody to show the poets of the eighteenth century that a man of genius might, if he liked, write poems upon nature. Their great writer, Pope, had not authorised such poetry. The following, by

the way, is a curious instance of Pope's way of writing upon natural subjects. There is in one of Burns's poems the following line :—

“ Hope ‘ springs exulting on triumphant wing.’ ”

It will be seen that the line is a quotation. The phrase quoted by Burns and applied by him properly enough to a spiritual quality appears originally in the *Windsor Forest* of Pope, and is there used to describe, of all things in the world, the flight of a pheasant, which it does not seem to resemble at all.

I have said that Mr. Bryant was mainly a poet of nature. He was little interested, as a dramatic or a critical writer is interested, in varieties of character ; but upon the general facts of human nature and destiny his mind was directed with much force. He was evidently a man strongly attached to a few friends who were bound to him by near ties of blood, or whom he had known intimately in his youth, and



upon these persons he has written some very eloquent poems,— *The Conqueror's Grave*, *The Life that is*, *The Future Life*, and others. The memory of these friends is indelibly impressed upon his mind, and he speaks of them in a heartfelt language which it is impossible to mistake ; but he seems at the same time to blend them with his sense of life in general. In his poem *To the Past*, he groups the inmates of the New England household in which he was reared with the “ empires ” and “ mighty names ” of old, with “ unpublished charity ” and “ wisdom disappeared : ”—

“ Thou hast my better years,  
Thou hast my earlier friends—the good, the kind,  
Yielded to thee with tears—  
The venerable form—the exalted mind.”

There are many passages in Mr. Bryant's poetry which show with what sympathy, and with what a strong and comprehensive gaze, he looked upon the course of life ; his poems contain a great deal of

a pathos which may be called general and philosophical.

It has been said that he was not an original writer, that the life of his country was not expressed in his verse, and it has been said that he was an imitator. In the forms, it is true, in which he expressed his thoughts he was not an innovator or discoverer, for he found that the forms commonly used by English poets answered his purposes. He was called, and he was, a correct poet, in the sense that his lines never had too few or too many feet, that his rhymes were perfect, and that he was always grammatical. But he was correct in a higher sense than this: he was most careful that his verse should be a correct copy of his always definite thought. It is not true that his poetry does not contain anything of the national life, and he was certainly not an imitator. In the sense that he looked ahead, and not backward or to the right or left, and that he

never thought to inquire of any course to which he was impelled, whether example or fashion had authorised it, his genius and his career were alike original; and his originality was not the less decided because it was not conscious or boastful. To the influence of example he was peculiarly, insensible; his firm eye was not to be diverted from the objects upon which his choice had fixed it; literary fashions, of which he must have lived through a dozen, ran off him like water. The mind of no eminent American literary man was more directed upon his country; and his poetry, as it seems to me, was appropriate to the country.

There are two very opposite courses which literature in a new country might be expected to take. Such a country having a slight past, literature may easily break with its trifling remains, and will be likely to approach the novel ideas of the time with confident friendliness. But the

literature of a new country might also be expected to take a very different and extremely conservative course. In a new country there is no large class of people occupied with art and ideas. Society is mainly engaged in a struggle with the external world. The poet therefore, in such a country, is like the early agriculturist who held the spade in one hand and the sword in the other. He is to devote his mind to such poetical things as he may see, but for the rest we should expect that he would encumber himself as little as possible with the distracting and novel thoughts of his time. It is this possible direction of the literature of a new country which Mr. Bryant represents. He was a politician and practical man, who was for the rest an artist. Of course, he was fairly interested in the subjects of which other people were writing, and of which society was thinking ; but these things did not control him as they do many poets.

So much of his attention as could be spared from the national politics and from the control of his newspaper he devoted to those common and general truths of human nature, which exist wherever there are men and women, and to nature, nowhere so mighty and so pure as in new countries.

That Mr. Bryant was able to pursue his double calling of poet and politician without confusion or discouragement was due in part to his resolute will, strong health, and systematic habits. But I believe that he suffered from no sense of contradiction between his two kinds of work, and had no consciousness of being weakened by the division of his attention between them. His capacity for practical things and observation of politics was, if not as great, just as genuine as his capacity for poetry. He was, moreover, the better able to pursue this double course because he was not weakened by the diversion of

his attention in certain other directions. He was without some tastes and impulses which poets commonly have. He had no bent towards the observation and description of individuals and of states of mind ; hence he was not a dramatic writer, nor, except so far as his taste and precision of judgment would have informed him truly concerning artists and works of art, was he by disposition a critic. He appears to have been always without the crudity and eccentricity apt to accompany minds which are governed by these impulses ; but he was also without their warmth and vivacity of sympathy. He was not a narrative poet, and therefore could not be the best translator of Homer. Though he certainly had gifts which would have helped him in that task, I doubt if he ever in his life had an impulse to tell a story or to describe a dramatic scene, or at any rate an impulse so strong that a little critical second thought could not have destroyed



it. Hence we are not surprised to find his Andromache holding between her hands the head of the dead Hector, and talking in the collected and moralising strain of *Thanatopsis*.

Though both a politician and poet, the two arts were in his hands kept distinct. He began to write at a time when it was the custom for poets to make verses in celebration and encouragement of the various struggling nationalities throughout the world. Mr. Bryant wrote a number of these. It might have been thought that as the poet was, during the dozen years which preceded the outbreak of the war, one of the leading opponents of slavery, his power of nervous and spirited verse would have found exercise against the slaveholders. But angry criticism of slavery was bitterly resented at the South, and Mr. Bryant was so essentially a man of conduct that he no doubt feared the effect of such writing upon a state of

things always perilously sensitive. It is possible to attack in prose with moderation, and this Mr. Bryant did ; but who would envy the task of a satirical poet who was obliged to be careful that his invective should hurt only a little ?

Mr. Bryant's face and figure was one well known to Americans. He was a handsome old man, having a slight, erect form, a fine head, and a white flowing beard. His eyes, when his mind was excited with a peculiar mirth which he had, glittered through their half-shut lids with a gem-like brilliancy. At the time when I knew him he was already past eighty. He wrote but little in his newspaper, and he never was a talkative man. But both in his conversation and in the little writing which he now and then did, it was common to meet with some stroke of his sense or imagination. Thus, I remember, in an editorial written at a time when political feeling in the United States was dull, and

the strife between parties languidly conducted, he compared the two parties to two exhausted gladiators staggering about the arena and striking at each other with weakly-directed blows. During a day which I spent with him in the country, I went with him to see a large elm which was on his farm. The old poet placed himself against it, and said: "You see a man is a very little creature by the side of a tree." These stories may seem trifling and unworthy of mention to those who knew him intimately, but the incident of the tree seemed to me a fine one.

During nearly his whole life Mr. Bryant was regarded as a cold and reserved man. But in the last decade of his life his manners changed greatly. He had become rich, and obtained a great reputation; and he was rendered amiable by his prosperity and popularity. Like the month of March, he came in like a lion and went out like a lamb. He was a great deal in society,

went to dinners and gave them, and became a successful speaker at public entertainments. No jokes are so successful as those of a famous man which are made in character. Mr. Bryant had attained the position of a man one half of the effect of whose witticisms consists in their relationship to his own personality. At a dinner given to Mr. Froude in New York, Mr. Bryant was very successful when he referred to Mr. Froude's account of Henry VIII., and hoped that, when his own life came to be written, the task might fall to one who should show the same skill in placing virtues in the most favourable light they could sustain, and in extenuating faults and misdemeanours, which had been displayed by their distinguished guest. At a public dinner at which some allusion had been made to his poetry, he said that he never knew of more than two poems which had been of any use to anybody; one of these was "A rainbow in the morn-

ing is the sailor's warning ; a rainbow at night is the shepherd's delight ;" and the other was "Thirty days hath September, April, June, and November," etc.

This last was quite in his vein. He had the merry treble and bright eye of successful age. There was something of Franklin in his reputation. He was a man of rules, an early riser, and very nearly a vegetarian. Having been often asked as to the methods by which he had accomplished so much, he gave to the world the hygienic and literary regulations which he had observed throughout his long life. He had always much to say against affectation and against modern extravagance of living. He thus figured to the younger generation as the representative of old-fashioned New England sagacity and simplicity.

I have given but a very slight sketch of Mr. Bryant's poetical works. I might have quoted from a class of poems, such

as *The Burial of Love* and *The Paradise of Tears*, in which is shown, under the form of allegory, his retentive grasp of important spiritual abstractions. He had passion; he had also pathos and pity, often of a stern and remote kind. There was on the other hand in his poetry a want of sympathy. It seems to me that this want limited even his remarkable gift for describing natural scenes. The feeling heart did not sufficiently support the perceiving intellect. His perceptions were not pliant enough. But, nevertheless, there can be no doubt that he saw with power and truth, and expressed his perceptions with felicity. His verse has the trait of pleasing the eye with successive images of the mountain solitude, the forest depth, and the "mid sea brine," while its prevailing pitch is that of a grave and lofty monotone. I am sure that his poetry must remain a permanent part of our American literature. Those who do not know it



should read, besides the poems I have mentioned, *The Evening Wind*, the poems upon Indian subjects, and others written in youth. His early poems are the best. They have greater delicacy than his later ones, and more feeling and sweetness. I have said they were very true. The epithets of the Yellow Violet and the Water-fowl surprise the reader by their exquisite suitability to the New England scenery. As each new phrase succeeds, he exclaims "How true!" "How charming!" Then, if these poems describe a certain landscape, they suggest also a certain time and society. They are a voice to us from that ancient and secluded New England world which has now disappeared. One sees the neat village, the white houses and row of elms, the piety, the simplicity and dignity of the society, the austere Sunday afternoon, and the white church and steeple.



## X.

### A TRIP TO A POLITICAL CONVENTION.

IT was on the afternoon of a Saturday in June that I started from Jersey City with a dozen of my acquaintances, to see a convention which was to be held at Cincinnati. We had a neat and commodious sleeping-car, which was all our own, and we were not so many but that each man might have a window and two or three seats to himself. Cincinnati would be reached by the evening of the next day. The company numbered some of my best friends. For a good part of the way to Philadelphia the colours of sunset remained

in the west. A beautiful light lingered on the rich and level meadows of New Jersey. When one is setting out for any distant place, the senses are apt to be awake. After leaving Philadelphia the beds were soon put up. I got into mine and lay awake waiting for Harrisburg, thinking that I might there catch sight of the Susquehanna, which is nowhere more beautiful than just before that town. I suppose I must have been on the look-out for Harrisburg before we had come within sixty miles of it. The moonlight without was almost like day. Every shadow which fell upon the window I supposed was Harrisburg. I often put aside the curtain, and only to see a ridiculous white shed, which stared at me a moment, and vanished. The splendour of the night gave to the shabby houses so common by the side of railroads in this country a look of absurdity. But those barns which sleep on the knolls in the deep pastures of Lancaster

County were not absurd, nor the villages, half a mile off, with a dozen red cottages, twice as many apple-trees, and a single rustic turret. I had been long asleep when I was awakened by the creaking and slow turning of the wheels of the train, and I knew that we had passed Harrisburg and were crossing the Susquehanna just where the Juniata meets it. I looked out, and there lay the river, spreading its broad mirror to the moon. It lay as I had seen it ten years before, as it had lain through all these years, in which my eyes had been occupied with meaner objects.

The stream had come down from a region which had been at one time very well known to me. Sweeping the tall grasses of its bottom, it had flowed downward from the harvest fields of Lycoming and perhaps had passed that day by sundown the rose-embowered porches of Northumberland. The Susquehanna is a peculiar river. It is very wide and yet

so shallow as to be of little use for navigation. But it is a great stream for flat-bottomed boats, and for long, dark, and sounding bridges. These bridges are of wood, and are usually black from the rains and the weather. They are very long and are nearly all closed in. Sometimes they are in the form of a bow, the rude stone piers upon which they rest emerging much farther from the surface in the middle of the river than near the shore. These bridges climb along the summits of the piles on which they rest in an often broken curve, or, I should rather say, in a polygonal line. They look as if they had been jammed upward by the rising of the middle piers; and this gives them a rickety tenuity which is extremely graceful. Other bridges are straight. I say that they are all closed, and so indeed they appear from the outside, but once within them and they often seem to be very open. The planks gape, giving glimpses

of the green water and the dripping rocks underneath. It is from this cause perhaps that the horses as they stumble through them wander from side to side, their hoofs making an unsteady yet deliberate thunder. The cobwebbed roofs are sprinkled with spaces of the blue sky. Through a plank on the upper side, half torn away, you look out into the light-hearted ether and upon the mottled bosom of the stream and see a morning solitude in which no step of man frightens yonder eagle from the dead branch of that tree by the river-side.

I say that the stream is mottled ; this is because the stream is so shallow and the surface takes colour from its many depths. It is, I suppose, because of the spots upon the water that the river, to one standing on the bank, appears to wheel ; it seems to be revolving about your feet as a centre with a radius of its own width. I believe that all streams appear to wheel in this way, but I have never seen the



illusion so strong as on the Susquehanna ; as the waters swing under the bridges, the bridges appear always to be either moving or just on the point of moving.

The upper Susquehanna is a region which I have not traversed in many years. But I never, in going southward, cross the river at its mouth, where you look out upon the wide Chesapeake, without remembering that it flows from a land and a people which I once knew and loved. I remember a certain window upon a hill behind a village. I could not from this window see the river, because the village intervened between it and the Susquehanna, but in May I looked over a bower of apple-blossoms straight into the vernal bosom of the mountain opposite. I remember Northumberland, which is one of the most beautiful spots in the world. Here the two branches of the Susquehanna join, the one flowing from the fertile plains at the foot of Bald Eagle Range, the other

from the far-famed region of Wyoming. At Northumberland there are islands in the middle of both the north and west branches, and these are joined to the banks by bridges. The walk from bank to bank is not a long one. I remember once walking the distance from bank to bank, late on a peaceful afternoon in June. The sun did not set in the west that day, but all over the land. The air was filled with an ample and brilliant light, and the sky sprinkled with wreaths of roseate clouds. I took that walk amid a bower of colour. I followed the road along one of the islands, which seemed to me wonderfully wide, passing a gate-keeper's cottage, and stopping upon the bridge to look down where the water lay under rosy and ethereal vapours and clouds of sunset. I saw this Eden but a single time. It was a scene of light, beauty, and peace, which I can but faintly recall.

But I forget that I am on my way to

Cincinnati. I passed by night the country of the Juniata, but on my return saw that verdant and undulating region refreshed by recent rains, the streams all full, and the land lying deeply green under a darkened sky. When I rose the next morning the train was already descending the western declivities of the Allegany Mountains. It proved to be a very hot day. All day long we journeyed through a vast mass of hot and sultry atmosphere. The pores of the cars, it seemed, must ooze under the weather. The train had gone but a few miles of our journey across the valley, when a little stream started up by the side of us and dogged our footsteps nearly the whole of the day. It ran not a dozen paces distant under my window, and was always there. Now and then taking for a moment a reluctant circle about the foot of the wooded hills, it was soon back again with benevolent assiduity, glittering steadily under my eyes, racing

the faster the faster we went, and the more insupportable the weather, spreading the cooler and shallower its web of waters among the stones.

The scenery of Southern Ohio was very peculiar, and to me very interesting. A forest without underbrush is almost unknown in New England. But as one passes the skirts of these Ohio woods there are no shrubs or bushes to conceal the trunks of the trees. The eye sees far in among their straight and clean ranks until the curious gaze is baffled by the uncertain and ever-vanishing images of the densely-peopled interiors. This absence of underbrush gives to the forests a park-like appearance. I have never known any scenery so classical as the glades which border the forests of Ohio and Indiana. Here are scattered great trees with tall trunks. Here the May apples line the blue grass. The young Hoosier, in some hour of noonday ennui, when the

fruit of the papaw has failed to afford pleasure and occupation, walking among the May apples, has found on the green stem of one of these weeds a ripe apple, which on tasting he discovers to be the most paradisiac surprise which he has ever taken in his mouth. He carries on his palate and in his fancy the memory of this Elysian morsel for a whole year. The next spring he sees in the same spot a thousand May apple blossoms, and he thinks that in the summer there will be a thousand May apples. But when summer comes, he finds that in a whole field of plants there is not a single apple. These glades, in which the blue grass is strewn with the May apples, are, I say, the only spots known to me which my fancy has been able to people with the figures of the old mythology. The young men and women in the many colleges and seminaries of this region write poems and compositions upon the gods and goddesses of

Greece, and when, on holidays, they go nutting and picnicking, perhaps carry with them into the woods these ancient stories. The glades are filled with deep shadows and abundant sunlight ; the blue grass, sown not too thickly with the trunks of mighty trees, might indeed have offered a tender carpet to the foot of Diana.

When I was the literary reviewer of a New York Daily, I was always on the lookout for the verses of a young poet who lived in this part of the world. I remember that one of his poems related how that once when Diana was at her bath in some clear spring, no doubt known to the poet, a sort of sublimated Hoosier of the fancy, himself quite nude and classic, passed near by. He quickly, however, ran away far through the green thick groves of May :—

“ Afeard lest down the wind of spring  
He’d hear an arrow whispering.”

By the way, I am told that this young poet is himself the possessor of wonderful



skill with the bow and arrow, that he is a sportsman, and that the winter before last he passed a number of weeks in the brilliant woods of Louisiana, shooting birds in the tops of the tallest trees.

It was Sunday and the bells were ringing as we went along. Everywhere we saw the evidences of thrift and comfort. Great factories and the immense chimneys of furnaces lined the road. Many a cottage with red roses before the door and white palings, it was easy to think to be the pleasant home of nice people. Here and there a new and smart dwelling, with a fountain and a graven image or two in the garden, bespoke the advancing fortunes of some energetic artisan. The farmhouses seemed to be larger and neater than those in the east. During the afternoon we fell in with the Little Miami,<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> The people of the country, whose authority should be final, pronounce the name of this river *Míámy*, making the *a* flat; would it not sound better if pronounced *Míámy*, making the *a* broad?

which we had on one side or another for the rest of our journey. We passed canoes steered by a girl and paddled by a young man in the bow. In other boats a man and wife and two or three children, out for an afternoon's pleasure, sat watching us until we were whirled beyond their horizon. In the midst of a clear and brilliant sunset we passed a pretty village which is on this river. The people were sitting out in the gardens before their porches, or had left their Sunday evening tea-tables to run to the windows to look at us. The sight of such a fine people as we passed all along the road was most agreeable to one's feelings. Certainly the populace has a peculiar dignity here. There is nothing one sees in this country quite so distinguished in appearance as the people. The varieties of persons on the train were not so imposing. I listened to one man who talked in a very loud and boastful strain. When asked if he thought that that result

of the convention which he wished for would really happen, he said: "I don't think anything about it; I know it." This way of speaking I have observed to be very common among American and English politicians. An energetic prophecy is thought to assist its own fulfilment. Of course, the result which this politician prophesied did not happen.

Before starting for Cincinnati, we had thought, the country being surely our way of thinking, that the ideas to which we were attached were of some consequence. But the journey taught us our mistake. We were no sooner in Cincinnati than we discovered that these ideas were of no account at all. The members of the convention had come to make such a President as suited themselves, not to confer as to that one who should be the best or with whom the country would be best satisfied. There really appeared to be a feeling among them that it was an impertinence on the part of

the country and of the press to have an opinion on a subject which was entirely their matter. What was still more singular was the indifference with which they listened to fears concerning the success before the people of the candidates whom they most favoured. It was not because they doubted the truth of your vaticinations that they were indifferent, but because they were reckless concerning the matter and did not appear to care whether they were true or not. Their affections or their interests were on the side of one candidate, and they were very willing that their party might run its chance of defeat, if at the same time their candidate might have his chance of success. There was no thought of disguising it and no pretence to any higher intentions. I heard "hifalutin" and demagogical talk only in the convention. The halls and parlours of the hotel were full of people in a perfectly cool frame of mind, if not of body.

They stood about under a great deal of red and white bunting, adorned with the portraits of candidates and the coats-of-arms of the various states, and drank lemonade.

Particular halls and parlours were taken by certain states. The names of the states were over the doors. Alabama was just opposite Minnesota. Men carrying in their minds and recollections widely separate climes and landscapes jostled one another and conversed in the same language. The looks of the people were much the same. The constantly increasing homogeneity of the country permits here very little diversity of speech, manners, or dress. Here and there was a man from New York or Boston who had a frock coat from Poole. There was the rich farmer's shiny broadcloth; there was the gray coat, of a stiff appearance, of the young master of the village store, who last week had retailed eggs and dry goods over the

counter of his most familiar bazaar, and who next week would recount in the same place the news of the convention to his customers. The traveller in this country must expect small amusement from picturesque diversity among our people. Still there was something very interesting to the imagination in the diversities of home and landscape which this crowd represented. But it was when they were gathered together into the great hall of the convention that they looked most like a mirror—an incomplete mirror—of our vast land. I obtained one of the stage tickets, and from an elevation behind the platform, in company with some six hundred “distinguished persons,” was able to look over the whole assemblage. On the morning of the opening of the convention I came in from the stage entrance, and at the first sight of the hall felt that pleasurable surprise and elation with which one suddenly sees a vast building filled with a



moving throng. The festooned flags and the other highly coloured devices about the platform were very agreeable to the eye. The cheap and flimsy character of the decorations was most expressive of the short-lived uses for which they had been put up. You perceived that long before the bunting would be soiled or the evergreens faded, the public act for which the throng had been brought together would have been performed. The event concerning which we wondered and conversed so much, and scrutinised so intently every indication of the oracles, would be an old and stale story in every part of the land before these flags could be put away, this platform pulled down, and these wreaths thrown into the street. The crowd in the body of the hall were standing when I came in. There was a loud murmur of conversation and an incessant moving of fans. When the chairman's gavel had been long going on the desk,

they began to compose themselves leisurely, almost tardily, into their seats ; yet they were soon seated. This steady confidence in its capacity to perform that for which it had been convened was one of the most interesting and imposing traits of the great body. There was no need to be in a hurry. Each hour had its special business. To-day a few well-understood steps would be taken, to-morrow a few more. A vote might be reached by to-morrow night, perhaps not till Friday, perhaps not even till Saturday. In due time, a candidate for President would be nominated, and then everybody would go home. But the convention was never so imposing as when the throng sat, black and silent, not a seat unfilled in all the countless and crowded rows, watchful and studiously attentive. In the midst of each group of delegates a staff had been set up, to the top of which was attached a placard bearing the name of their state. This array of pasteboard

set on sticks gave one a sense of the great area which the assembly covered, and produced a strong effect upon the imagination and the sympathy. But the convention exhibited the homogeneity of the people of this country,—the “solidarity,” as the learned express it, rather than their diversity. It is true one or two of the orators proclaimed their localities in a decided and original manner. A little fellow from North Carolina who had mounted a chair and wildly waved a paper at the chairman, on being recognised ascended the platform and in a piercing voice announced to the convention that he was from “the tar-heel state.” He had black trousers and the long-tailed broadcloth coat, which, in old days in the South, was considered the most correct dress possible for a young man. A delegate from the far South, by a fine stroke of accidental wit, nominated a rather light and talkative politician, in the name of “the land of the magnolia

and the mocking-bird." But the aspect of the convention demonstrated that one race had filled and subdued the entire country. It was plain that the Yankee could whittle the palm quite as well as the pine. As I looked over the assembly I compared the predictions of Hamilton concerning the relations of the states to the country at large with the spectacle before me. Hamilton expected that the state governments would intercept and take to themselves the regard of the people; that they would shut out from the view of the people the government at the Capital; that the idea of the central power would be remote and vague, and the idea of the state near and distinct. How plainly do these prognostications bring up before us the changes of ninety years! How like the composition of a schoolgirl do the theories concerning the future condition of society of the most intelligent statesman appear when com-

pared with that subsequent spectacle which progress, necessity, and accident have prepared. Hamilton could not foresee the time when a message could be made to travel the distance to the Pacific Ocean faster than the sun ; when Cincinnati and St. Louis would be chosen as places for conventions because of their being in the centre of population ; when the distance from New York to Cincinnati would be twenty-four hours ; when everybody would travel, and pretty much everybody would emigrate. Could Hamilton have seen the Centennial, we can imagine him seeking in the mind of each of the millions who visited the Vienna Bakery that clear sentiment of allegiance to his native or adopted state which he predicted must exist. Looking over the heads of the convention, it was plain that, though the members of that assembly were seated by states and voted by states, the state governments were to them mere instruments of utility and

convenience. The unity of the people had been accomplished.

I have said that you heard very little demagogical talk among the groups around the hotels, nor was there much to be heard in the public meetings or in the convention. I heard one "eloquent" speech at one of the evening meetings. The orator was a dark, full-blooded person, with a powerful voice. At intervals during this man's speech his face would become a deep blue, his limbs would tremble violently, and his form would quiver as if galvanised. His speech made me think of what sportsmen say of the song of the black-cock. This bird has three distinct notes in the song which he utters as a challenge to his rivals. He constantly repeats these, standing in the early morning, among his hens, under a fir-tree on an Alpine height. It is while he delivers the last of these notes that the hunter must take aim, for during its utterance his rage and passion are so



great that he hears or sees nothing. His body trembles violently ; froth issues from his beak ; his eyes are covered with the nictitating and glittering membrane. The orator reminded me of this bird.

What mainly struck one in the proceedings of the convention was that, considering at least what should have been their object, they paid no attention to reason in their method of obtaining it. A political act of the greatest importance was settled scarcely more reasonably than if a half a dozen paper slips had been put in a hat and shaken. Then no debate was allowed. A convention is supposed to be a deliberative body. There was indeed some deliberation, but it was altogether concerning unimportant matters. Not the least deliberation was permitted with regard to the great act for which the convention had been called together. There was not the least opportunity for an interchange of "views," in case any one present had any.

Had there been such an opportunity, I doubt if any one would have dared to take advantage of it. He would have made the convention angry, and the minority to which he belonged would have considered him a marplot and a busybody. No one seemed to represent himself.

Political conventions in this country are often held in very hot weather. They crowd to their utmost the towns in which they assemble. The rooms of the hotels have each three beds. The stranger who goes to look on, and who is not likely to have ordered his room many weeks before, must usually be content with a top room on the inside. The air is stifling, so that it would be hard to sleep if he were alone ; but as the other occupants have their own hours, even such sleep as the heat and the close air will leave him, will be much broken in upon. The guests, as the phrase is, dine almost by platoons. The food is, of course, bad. But were the dis-

comforts greater than they are—and the only serious one is that of having to get on with very little sleep—a great political convention is a sight which makes it worth while to put up with them. One gets, too, such a lively impression of the country in the journey. As you go and return, the people along the route are in eager conversation concerning the event. Then, as I said before, the sight of such a fine people is agreeable. They look so attractive. The boys who sell popcorn, the men who stand on the platforms, the young ladies who get in for a short ride to a neighbouring town, and who talk with the conductor about the national convention or the local picnic, all seem to one to be worthy members of a great progressive democracy.

In such a journey one is apt to fall into a reverie concerning the mysteries of popular government. It is very interesting to consider what are the sources and

processes of public action in a democracy. Of course, the people at large are the supposed authors of nearly everything that is done by the state. Yet of by far the greater part of what is done the people are undoubtedly not the authors—are indeed almost ignorant. Who does it then? and how is it done? and are there discoverable laws according to which the action of democracies must proceed? Perhaps the keynote of the matter is to be found in the ability of the common people to know whom to trust. Democracies have a wonderful talent for perception into individual character. They recognise, if not at once, at least soon, an unsound judgment or a selfish and unscrupulous ambition.

The sense that one is a sharer with anybody met by the roadside in the action of this country is pleasant to me. I remember one summer afternoon, near sundown, riding among some great hills in the

neighbourhood of Lake Mahopac, when I saw a vast hill before me, in a fold of which, near the top, was a bare farmhouse. The farmhouse I passed, and saw some children playing at the sill, a woman washing clothes by the fence, and a tall, barefooted lad leaning over the gate, the rim of his straw hat falling over his shoulder. A few hundred feet farther on, finding I could not ride quite to the top, I got off and climbed up, when I was suddenly confronted by an astonishing spectacle. The landscape revealed to me was a scene of breathless exertion and confusion. I saw a succession of round green hills, like that on which I stood, in mighty and silent commotion, wrestling, leaping, hill on hill all jostled together in wild tumult and struggling for the zenith. Presently the landscape grew quiet, and, before I turned from the spot, had become grave and deeply verdant. The farmhouse was not in sight, but from below I could hear the

wild cries of these little ones of the desert. Reflecting how such scenes as that I then saw succeeded to the farthest limits of the country, I made my way back. As I passed the farmhouse, the boy still stood by the gate, and I thought with pleasure that this great land was his and mine.





## XI.

### A RECOLLECTION OF THE SOUTH.

THE glance which history will bestow upon the position of the Southern people during the Civil War will not be a severe one. It will regard the participators of that insurrection as the victims of a long train of causes, of which their position was the inevitable consequence. The people of the South could not continue to live in political union with the people of the North, when that people thought them wicked and cruel. As the condemnation of the North must have been unremitting, so also must have been the resentment of the South. A violent ending was sooner

or later necessary. This must be evident to any one ; but those who did not know Southern society before the war may be in need of some reading and imagination to see the full depth of that anger with which the accusations of the North and of the world were received by the people of the South. They felt that the voice of the whole world was against the social order in which their existence was bound up ; and they resented this with bitter pride. No doubt, any people in their position would have felt just as they did. In reading recently the life of Sir Thomas Fowell Buxton, I was greatly struck with the resemblance of the feeling therein described of the West Indian planters at the time of the abolition of slavery by Great Britain to that of the Southern people. I seemed to be sitting in the House of Representatives during the winter of '59-60, and looking down at Barksdale and Keitt. The sentiments of the two

communities were identical ; but of course the impotent resentment of a handful of remote colonists was a different matter from that anger shared by a great and a proud people, long accustomed to complete self-government, and, indeed, to governing everybody with whom they had anything to do. I call to mind many particulars which illustrate the feeling of the Southern people. I was once at the house of a Southern planter, when a Northern religious periodical to which he subscribed arrived, having an article against slavery. I remember the rage with which he read it, and how he paced the floor in his anger. This man was a good Christian, a good husband and father, a good citizen, a good man in all the relations of life, and very generous and kind hearted. Yet he found what he and everybody else did whom he knew spoken of, perhaps justly, as a great crime—as the practice of men unjust and cruel. We have to conceive of

this anger, multiplied five million times throughout a vast area of country, in which not a single dissenting or warning voice was audible, to understand the mind of the Southern people. I am sure that any other five million men in the world would in their circumstances have done just as they did. Habit, example, and interest would have made you and me, had we been placed in the same position as the Southern planters, think and act as they did. Why, but the other evening I met in a quiet part of Surrey a fine old Tory squire, whose family had had property in Jamaica, and who inveighed to me strongly against the abolition of 1820; he complained that the reformers had ruined him with their nonsense.

Nor do I think, if history does not condemn severely the action of the South as a whole, it will set apart any class of the Southern people for special condemnation. Some of the leaders, no doubt, saw what

was coming and made ready for it ; some even conspired to bring it about. Certain of the younger men of the Gulf States, also orators and editors, were eager for the culmination of the matter, and prompt to welcome it. But history in deciding who was to blame for the insurrection, will, with these modifications, say that nobody did it in particular,—that it did itself. It was the result of a long train of causes. During the colonial days no other opinion was expressed than that the existence of slavery in America was a misfortune. Strange to say, it was at the very earliest inception of the American nation, that the first indication appears of a disposition to defend or even excuse it. In a preliminary draft of the Declaration of Independence, the introduction and maintenance of slavery by the British Government was made one of the grounds of complaint against George III. The delegates from South Carolina objected

to this statement, and it was struck out. This, it is said, is the earliest indication known to us that the South was beginning to be conscious of an interest in slavery. For a few years succeeding the revolutionary war, nearly all slaveholders regarded slavery as wrong in principle, and as destined soon to pass away. As years rolled on, as the South increased in wealth and extent, and as slavery became more and more necessary to the people, they stopped thinking about the abstract question. They held it in abeyance. This was for many years the state of the Southern mind towards the question. At the time just previous to the outbreak of the war, the South had forgotten that they had ever acknowledged slavery to be wrong. They were perfectly contented with it; the entire community was eager to defend it. All Southerners were indeed deeply attached to their society. There was certainly that in Southern society



which might well excite enthusiasm and affection. My recollection of that society is that it was a most attractive one ; I even found its "peculiar institution," bad as it was, very charming. It was my good fortune to have seen it intimately, and I can testify to the fact that it possessed a certain dangerous feline beauty, which strangely pleased. But although all Southerners were most attached to their society and to the peculiar system which distinguished it, it was not until very shortly before the war that they were zealous to preach an aggressive gospel of slavery. I think the great bulk of them had an instinct to say as little about it as possible. But there had been for years a growing demand for a principle that should justify slavery. The young men seemed to be in want of such an abstraction. Then the orators needed it. The South was an oratorical country ; the mass meeting and the barbecue had more

influence than the newspaper, and we know what an advantage a simple and irrefragable abstraction is to an orator. The orators of the North had their abstractions, and good use they made of them. There was an invigorating simplicity in their generalities which we all remember. The North was confident that slavery was wrong. It was an unpleasant situation for slaveholders to be compelled to answer that, while it was true that slavery was wrong, still that circumstances were such, etc. etc. Spirited young gentlemen at the South did not care to meet the candid observations of Garrison and Phillips in that way. They wanted a principle of their own. Accordingly, ingenious clergymen and professors had been at work for years making theories to supply the demand. Some of them showed that the Bible had foredoomed the negro to be a servant of servants. The South was perhaps the most solidly and

literally orthodox community in Christendom, and this little text from the Old Testament went a long way with them. By and by, however, their instructors grew bolder, and told them that slavery, instead of being a bad thing in the abstract, was a good thing in the abstract; that it was an institution necessary to man's perfection, divine and eternal, upon which the millennial sun must one day shine. They settled it in their minds that the "coming man" would "own his niggers." This was just what the young men wanted. The abolitionists were not to have all the abstractions: now they had one of their own!

The key to the rebellion is to be found in the tyranny of the mass over the individual. Daniel Webster compared the crisis of 1793 in France to a wheel which kept going round faster and faster, till at length it took fire with the rapidity of its revolution. It was in this way that things got

going in the South just before the outbreak of the war. Public sentiment got upon a down grade. There was also this point of resemblance between the French Revolution of '93, and the overthrow of the Union in the South. It was as much fear as ferocity that seized the people of France. Men were afraid to think against the tide of the popular impulse. They were fearful that the ominous public eye might read their hearts, and they adopted a language and behaviour all the more violent for the dissent they could not get rid of. Of course, a revolution extending over a great agricultural country, and carried through by Anglo-Saxons, must have differed from an outbreak of Frenchmen in the streets of Paris ; but Southern society possessed some elements of terrorism which were wanting even in France. It would not do that anything pertaining to slavery should be said in the presence of slaves. The voices of men had an unnatural hush.

The man who undertook to refine and discriminate soon saw a suspicious look on the faces of his auditors. The safe thing to do was to vociferate loud hatred of the North and praise of the South, and the louder you vociferated the safer you were. The more radical and violent orator was the man the people followed.

I say that I do not think that the leading men of the South were, as a rule, much more to blame than the rest of the community. The loyal press and pulpit during the war was fond of likening the rebel leaders to the fallen angels of Milton. "It was certainly wrong to fall," one of the rebels might retort, "but when we found ourselves in new quarters, was it not natural that each should look about him for the coolest place he could find?" I have no doubt that most of the political and military leaders of the rebellion were, two years before the war, Union men. But they regarded secession as inevitable, and

there was nothing in the tone of the North during the winter of '60 and '61 to make them think that it would not be peaceably accomplished. The Union looked not only to rebels and foreigners, but even to ourselves, as if quietly falling apart. It was sheer despair that took the life out of many men at the South who might have offered vigorous resistance. "If South Carolina and Georgia go, why need we care to stay?" said the Virginian. "If one goes, all is gone; the whole thing is at an end." This indifference and hopelessness certainly extended to the North. If at any time we are disposed to assume too lofty a tone, it will be edifying to go over the events of that winter, and to remember how some who were a year afterwards uncompromising patriots, then felt and talked. "Wayward sisters, depart in peace!" said Winfield Scott, Commander-in-chief of the army. Foreigners were shocked at our levity. "They are married and are given in mar-



riage," said Bull Run Russell. I remember well how Fifth Avenue looked in those days. A golden sultry afternoon like that which enveloped the Rome of the early emperors descended upon us. It seemed a very late age of the world. The smart young men drove their waggons to the park; the prettily-dressed women tripped briskly along the pavement; the sunlight in the long street was as bright as ever. But it all seemed to no purpose. Our ambitions and intentions were at an end. The young continent, but yesterday discovered, with the grizzly, the wolf, and the red man, not yet driven from its forests, with its brand-new street-cars and Arctic soda-fountains, seemed as old as Rome, or Corinth, or the ancient cities of the East.

But we were better patriots than we thought. It was to the credit of the country that we could not at once accept the idea of civil war. It is no matter for regret or humiliation that it was neces-

sary that a period of despair, inattention, and profane apathy should elapse before the people of the country were conscious of the true character of their patriotism. Time was needed to realise the full meaning of the situation—to recognise the fact that the hope of a mighty and a happy future for the land must indeed be abandoned. This the genius of the nation at length saw with clear and awakened vision.

“Troy must not be, nor goodly Ilion stand!”

It was then that there came upon the country that joyful enthusiasm by the aid of which we entered upon the task of securing our destiny,—of turning into solid fact the political dream in which we had been educated.



## XII.

### JOURNALISM AS EXEMPLIFIED BY WALTER BAGEHOT.

I HAVE recently read the *Literary Studies* of Mr. Walter Bagehot, published since his death. I was curious to see this book as a statement of his opinions upon the subjects which it discusses, but still more as an expression of the author. One is interested to observe the steps by which a man, attracted by many and diverse subjects, at last finds his way to the kind of work which he can do best. The essays are pleasant and amusing reading, but somewhat disappointing. The fault of them is that they are too theoretical and not

sufficiently immediate. Instead of looking directly at the subject and describing it as he perceives it to be, he argues, infers, etc. But this was not Mr. Bagehot's way of writing upon other than literary subjects; the best things which occur in his far more valuable political works and his writings in the *Economist* are the results of a profound and subtle intuition. He had a singularly exact apprehension of sentiments shared by masses of men. In his book on the British Constitution, he makes this remark, that the reason why the press in the United States at ordinary times is able to attack the Government with so little sense of power is that the Government must be in office till the end of its term, and cannot at any time be turned out, as in England. This remark shows how clearly he had the state of our public sentiment before his eyes. The fact that Mr. Bagehot had never been in this country makes all the more remark-

able the direct apprehension which he shows in his writings of our ways of thinking.

It is as a journalist that Mr. Bagehot seems to me to have been particularly admirable and worthy of imitation. Among the admirable qualities of his writings in the *Economist*, that which ought especially to be imitated was his respect for business and public action. He seemed always to be saying with reference to any great public question, "What should I myself do, had I the matter to decide?" His manner was that of a man who sits down among a number of friends, as honourable and intelligent as himself, to discuss things and not to make a vain and ineffectual display of words. His especial title to praise and imitation is that he looked upon journalism as action rather than literature, and upon himself as a partaker in the public business of the day rather than as a man of letters.

Literature and journalism are not only very distinct—they are very far apart; they are in some particulars almost irreconcilable. The one point which they have in common is that the professors of both express ideas by means of alphabetic writing. Authors usually write short articles before they write books, and these are printed in newspapers. It thus happens that there are few men of letters, particularly in this country, who have not written in newspapers. This is about the sum of the connection between the two pursuits. In almost all respects they are separate. The success of a man of letters depends upon the high excellence of his few productions. The success of the journalist depends upon the average excellence of his many writings. One or ten or a hundred good articles no more make a good journalist than one swallow makes a summer. In the next place, literature is written to last. But in writing for



newspapers it should never be forgotten that that which is written to-day must be printed to-morrow, and will have been turned into wrapping paper by the day following. The truth is that very fine writing is out of place in newspapers. The capacity for doing such writing is rather a disadvantage than an advantage to the journalist. The journalists who possess this ability succeed rather in spite of it than on account of it. A strong desire to say things perfectly is a hindrance to a newspaper writer. There is not apt to be more than one perfect expression of a thought, and a writer who has, or who thinks he has, achieved this does not care to express it in another and a cheaper way. Now if there is one thing in which a journalist must excel, it is in the capacity for incessant and infinitely varied repetition. Then the main aim of the literary artist, like other artists, is very properly to

please. But it will not do for the journalist to make a pursuit of tickling men's ears ; he must seek to affect things. If the journalist's object is merely to write pleasing articles, his is one of the poorest businesses in the world. It is almost the only pursuit in which the worker does not improve as he grows older. The writer of pleasing articles is no better at fifty than at thirty ; indeed he is not so good, for at fifty he has lost the zest in ink and paper and a fresh proof sheet which he had at thirty. In almost all callings the mind is constantly getting new thoughts, which instruct it for the future, and the judgment is undergoing, from day to day, a process of education which never pauses. " Shall I do this or that ? " the worker asks himself almost hourly, and in his own mind argues the " pros " and " cons " of the case with thoughts which are scarcely ever turned into language,—which, indeed, most men would be incap-

able of turning into language. It is only the journalist who takes the right view of his business who gains with years this education of the judgment. His facts increase rapidly ; his studiously formed ideas have been corrected and re-corrected by the observation of events which have taken place under his own eyes ; his opinion, therefore, is worth more at fifty than at thirty ; his judgment is stronger, and he is an abler man. The journalist should therefore think of himself as a man of affairs and not as a literary man. He should write as if he were counselling the public as to what they should do in the business of the day, and he should give to that counsel the best reflection which the well-known and understood limitations of his vocation will allow.

There is one change which must take place before subordinate contributors to newspapers can write as freely and seriously as Mr. Bagehot wrote : they must cease to

write anonymously. How this change is to be brought about, or whether it can be brought about at all, I do not now stop to ask. I am sure, however, that the change must take place before newspapers can be so written. Such writing must be perfectly candid and, as between writer and reader, intimate,—must state the “cons”, as well as the “pros,” and must “give the devil his due.” It must be a kind of thinking aloud. It is impossible to write thus if the contributor must be on the look-out to suppress opinions which may conflict with those of his associates. He is writing for the information of a reader who wants to meet with the exactly true opinion, and who cares nothing about the agreement of the contributor’s opinions with those of other persons.

There is no doubting the advantages of the anonymous method. The unity and positiveness of expression which characterise anonymous journals produce on the

minds of readers a notion of strength which is satisfactory and agreeable. This positive way of writing appears to have been especially suited to the peculiar nature of our political history. Our questions have been simpler than those which the English have had to consider. The subjects which Mr. Bagehot has had to discuss, such as those which relate to the Eastern question and to the internal affairs of England, were complex and recondite, and it was natural to treat of them in a cautious, scrutinising, and somewhat hesitating manner. In our own recent history, however, there has been little to divide the opinions of educated men. The better things have been sufficiently known and agreed upon ; our misfortune is that the worse have been followed. A decided and even violent manner of writing was therefore to be expected in this country, and it has not been without its uses. So accustomed had we become to

the sight of successful corruption and vulgarity that it was something to have them called by their right names. In the future let us hope that our politics may get without the region of the minor moralities and become concerned with experiments and enterprises which shall demand the most respectful study. This new character of our political life may call for a nicer and more critical consideration of public questions from newspaper writers.

There is little doubt that the opinion of a great newspaper must have more weight than that of an individual. But it may be that an error is often made in attributing to the newspaper a weight which really belongs to the opinion itself. The utterance has weight, not because it is an opinion of the newspaper, but because it is the sentiment of a large mass of a community. If the paper is a party paper, it is the sentiment of the party which is expressed; if the paper is an independent



paper, it is often the dominant sentiment of the hour which is expressed. Then, if there is an undoubted advantage in anonymous writing, there is also an advantage in personal writing. Great popular journalists, like Cobbett and Greeley, have succeeded, mainly because they were able to make themselves known to many men. The power of making themselves known has also been possessed by certain writers who, like Mr. Bagehot, have addressed a small number of readers. There must be many thousands of people in any great community who desire to form correct opinions upon political subjects, and who would read studiously the writing of a man who had zealously sought to form correct opinions. So few people have the time or the ability to gain definite and thorough views upon current public questions, that one who has such opinions will have only too much influence with his fellows. And why should not a journalist have, like

other men of business, the advantage of his reputation? The reader of this journalist will say, "I have often tried this writer; he seems to labour to form a true idea of things, and to point out the proper course; I should like to see what he has to say now." Such a writer would no doubt stimulate curiosity and active thinking in the minds of his readers. It seems to me indeed that all the considerations of improvement to the writer, and profit to the reader, and of inherent value in the things written, favour the plan of signed articles. There are, no doubt, grave reasons why it will not seem possible to adopt it, but I believe that the most that may be said is that no great newspaper with signed editorials has yet appeared. We have seen the once prized and lauded anonymous method abandoned by reviews and magazines; it is not impossible that the same change may come to pass with newspapers.

There are journalists both in England and the United States who are really in the position of contributors of signed articles. These are either correspondents, who of course are responsible only for their own opinions, or controllers of newspapers. It is manifest that the controller of a newspaper is the only editorial writer who has the freedom of a writer of signed articles. Mr. Bagehot was in this relation to the *Economist*. He was able to think aloud in that paper. His style is an excellent model for writers who would do what he did. It was very conversational and cautious, and was therefore well suited to express the thoughts of one who was first of all an inquirer, who was rather a judge than an advocate, though he was capable of advocating effectively views which he had accepted with circumspection. It is a style suited to the discussion of complex and delicate subjects, and is one which should be more widely

practised. But style, as has often been said, is a matter of character. The pace of some minds is swifter than that of others; the pace of the style which expresses them is, therefore, swift. Mr. Bagehot's style moves with the caution of his thoughts. His mind scrutinises the subject, and, from its careful way of proceeding, adopts a language which is cautious and has but little motion. There are other minds, however, to whom it is natural to express thoughts formed with the greatest deliberation with rapidity and rhythm. Both styles are true, although of the two the first is the less liable to exaggeration and affected imitation. A solicitude concerning public action is, however, equally incumbent upon the writers of both styles. The rhythmical writers, those who speak with "winged words," are likewise to be men of action. To them perhaps applies the answer of Demosthenes, when asked what were the

conditions of eloquence, that the first was action, and the second was action, and the third was action. Demosthenes could not have meant that eloquence consisted in energy of manner ; he rather meant, one would suppose, that the condition of eloquence was a strong desire on the part of the orator to persuade men to take some course of action about which he should be deeply solicitous. .



### XIII.

#### NEWSPAPER LITERARY CRITICISM.

THE newspaper critic of books has a very different office to perform from that of the critic of pure literature. Literary criticism in its best sense deals with pure literature,—with books the excellence of which gives them permanence. With books of the hour only, except as they illustrate the manners and taste of the time, the pure critics have little to do. They are under no obligation to judge the half thoughts of half authors, to measure the exact depth of writers who are not very deep, to say just how witty and eloquent, certain tolerably



witty and eloquent writers are. They deal, on the contrary, with minds which possess superior powers or which have produced unusual effects upon the world. A few books of the higher class from the pens of contemporaneous writers may now and then fall to the share of the newspaper reviewer, and by his treatment of these he may produce a good deal of effect. But most of the books will have no pretensions to be placed in this class ; of those which do aspire to this rank some will pretty nearly reach it ; many more will fall far short of it. In what way should the newspaper critics write of the books which are placed on their tables ? and, especially, to what extent ought they in their judgments to consider the feelings of the authors ?

I have heard it said by some that inferior books should either not be reviewed at all, or that, if reviewed, only those things should be said which could be said in commendation of them. The first plan, to

pass unnoticed books which, to be reviewed justly, must be reviewed adversely, is impracticable, because publishers and even authors wish that their books shall be noticed unfavourably rather than that they shall be overlooked, and because a great many books, either from their popularity or the popularity of their authors, or from some accidental reason, have such an importance that no newspaper can neglect them. The other plan, that of noticing the book and saying only such things as may be said in praise of it, is practicable enough and often enough practised, but is bad in almost every way. The effect upon the critic is bad. It must not be forgotten that the critic has a soul as well as an author ; that his integrity is in constant danger ; that he has continual temptations to subterfuge, casuistry, and dishonourable compromise with many untoward circumstances which surround him. But no author appears to think that a

critic has a soul, or that it is a matter of the least consequence what becomes of it. He regards the flattery of his insincere reviewer with the tolerance that he extends to the crimes of the party which gives him an office, or the iniquities of a business from which he draws an income. An author may know that a critic is describing his book in phrases which are from the mouth rather than from the head or heart, and yet he will think him a pleasant fellow for his want of character. So long as his feelings are protected, he does not care to what condition the critic's want of honesty may reduce his own mind.

A book review should aim to represent the book truthfully to the public. The wickedness of a lie consists not in using false language, but in intending to produce a false impression. A critic may tell the truth in detail,—that is, each particular statement made by him may be true; but if the effect of his review is to make people

believe that to be a good book which is really a bad one, the public has been deceived, and the critic has been a deceiver. There is one tolerably valid plea to be urged in extenuation of the guilt of such a proceeding,—that the public has learned not to believe the reviewers and that nobody is fooled ; but this is a consideration of which newspaper conductors, though they might recognise the force of it, would be likely to say as little as possible. I know there is a kind of book notice which “tips the wink” to the reader and seems to say, “We must be careful not to wound the feelings of the author, who is a worthy person, but don’t buy the book.” This is no doubt innocent enough at times, but when such a method of treatment ceases to be a good-natured exception and becomes the habit of a writer, I doubt if it is wholesome. Besides, casuistry of this kind may lead to worse. For it is often hard to invent a phrase which is both true

and kind,—very hard sometimes when the printer is waiting for “copy;” and the writer is in danger of passing by those easy gradations which moralists describe from skilful and cautious euphemisms into downright fibbing.

That a critic should err rather on the side of appreciation than the want of it,—that he should go through a book on the look-out for excellences,—appears to be of late a generally accepted notion. It seems to me that the critic should be on the look-out for neither faults nor excellences. Or perhaps I ought to say that he should be on the look-out for excellences, but not too strenuously. His aim should be to know the truth of the book. To toil through some book which you know all the while to be feeble, painfully searching for some indication of ability upon which to found a compliment, is an unwholesome occupation. It is the business of the author to impress the reader, and the critic

is only a reader who has special reasons for knowing the truth of a book. When you go to hear an actor you do not consider yourself bound to inquire whether or no his performance is a good one ; if he has ability let him show it. The same requirement should be made of a book. And when a book is plainly "so-so" and nothing more, "fairish," "rather good" (which is often another name for "rather bad"), the critic should not be forced to probe and describe it, but should be permitted to dismiss it at once to the limbo of mediocrity to which it belongs. To be under the necessity of defining things not worth definition he feels to be hurtful to his usefulness and repugnant to his notion of truth. Of the extreme discomfort of it most reviewers must be aware. To throw a plummet-line deep enough for the sea into a frog pond, and to stand all day on the bank, dabbling the lead in the mud and wondering how deep it



is,—few occupations could be more uncomfortable.

To write only what is good of a book is therefore bad for the critic ; it is bad also for the public. It is often said that to write and bring out a book is a serious matter ; that the author has worked hard upon it and is much interested in it ; that it will, if a poor book, be certain to die of itself very shortly ; why, therefore, it is asked, wound the feelings of the author by letting him and the world know that he has been a fool for his pains ? This view has a charity and an appearance of liberality which disposes one hearing it for the first time to accept it. But a little reflection shows one that it will not do. The critic is a literary educator, a professor of literature with a class which embraces the entire reading community. He is to instruct if he can ; he is to judge fairly and to give "his own to each," but his main business is to stimulate the minds

of people, to conduct a live conversation with the public concerning the books they are reading. People love to compare their opinions of the books they have read with those of one whom they imagine to know something. They will read a notice of a book they have read in preference to one of a book they have not read, and this seems to show that they wish sympathy and conversation rather than information from the critic. Their own ideas are perhaps uncertain and timidly held ; and they are glad of thoughts which agree or disagree with their own, if these thoughts are put forward with zest and candour. Their opinions may be uncertain, but the likings of even the simplest readers are clear enough. Editors and publishers of newspapers may care very little for the books they write and print notices of, but the people who buy the books and sit up half the night to read them care a great deal. The critic has, therefore, what professors

of literature very often have not, a class prepared to hear him gratefully and curiously. That he may really assist his audiences it is not so necessary that his opinions be absolutely just and true (they should, of course, be as just and true as he can make them) as that they should be eager, free, and candid. An incorrect opinion expressed zestfully will have a more lively, and I believe a more profiting, effect upon the reader than a correct one expressed timidly and with a glance around for fear that some one is hurt by it. I do not say that critics should be severe upon foolish books ; indeed, I think they should not be ; but I say that the taking into account the author's feelings will be likely to impair the critic's freedom and candour. The question is, Shall the critic be free and useful, or shall he be insipid and inefficient ; shall he speak his mind plainly and to the point, or shall he limit himself to timid euphemisms and communicate

with the reader by innuendoes and implications ; shall he be his own man,—as the phrase is, shall his foot be on his native heath, or shall he walk on eggs ?

It is best, then, for the critic and the public that the feelings of authors shall be left out of the question by book reviewers ; is it best for the authors themselves ? If not, it is then only to be said that when the author's interests are opposed to those of the public, it is the critic's business to consider those of the public. Of course the interests of the whole body of authors cannot be ultimately opposed to that kind of criticism which has the best effect upon the public mind. But uncivil things must be said of some authors, and the authors of whom they are said cannot be expected to like them. I doubt, though, if they hurt as much as they are supposed to do. An old fox-hunter, speaking of the perfections of the chase as practised in England, said that " he liked it, the horses liked it,

the dogs liked it, and he'd be d—d if he didn't believe the fox liked it." I believe, though I offer the opinion with diffidence, that it is a matter of surprise to many authors that unfavourable printed comments on their books do not hurt them more. A man, tolerably sensitive to the ill opinion of acquaintance whispered privately from mouth to mouth, will find himself perusing with equanimity a column of ridicule and adverse comment concerning himself, spread out for all the world to read. At any rate, whether or no authors are angry with critics who oppose them, it will not be hard to prove that they ought not to be. It will not be hard to show that the critic who says that you are no poet is not so much your enemy as you think. To possess certain artistic gifts is very necessary to you ; but your friend the critic cares little whether you have these gifts or not,—likes you very well as you are—better, perhaps, than some people

who have them. There is a surprise, a little shock, when your friend reviews your book, to find that all along he has been carrying about in his mind notions concerning your abilities very different from those you entertain yourself. You have had many long and friendly talks together ; in some charming after-dinner hours of social talk or social silence you have come to like each other very much ; and yet, deceitful wretch, the evidence of the printed page containing his comment upon your production discovers the fact that he does not think you a man of genius. The fault is in your misconception of the nature of the impression which you make upon him. We are apt to think that men know us better than they do. Each knows so well his own history and feelings that he cannot entirely help thinking that he appears to another as he appears to himself. How little we who nod to each other in the street really



know of each other ! The essential facts of honesty and benevolence men are skilled to discern, because these facts concern themselves ; but with regard to those peculiarities of mind which make us poets, artists, and the like, men are to each other as trees walking. You know your acquaintances as you know the states on the map in which the capitals only are given. You are certain that your friend is honest ; you are certain that he is kind. Whether he is a genius or not you have never thought to ask ; if he be one, very likely it is not for the qualities that make him a genius that you value him. In your moments of most intimate and agreeable talk, do you discern in his countenance the sense of nature, the gift of music, etc. ? Such gifts even as wit and sense,—powers which have their place in conversation,—though valuable, are not necessary in our friends. Some men we like for these qualities, and some men we

like for the want of them. We like to meet one man because his talk is full of knowledge and acute observation. His amiable neighbour may never in his lifetime have achieved a profound thought or a graphic expression ; yet the very vagueness of his mind is so mixed up with some spiritual charm familiar to us that we find ourselves liking him for the want of that which we value in another.

It is well for an author to have this thought before his mind. The reflection should at any rate induce critics to perceive that they are not really unkind in denying to an author gifts which they do not think he possesses. But a critic should be very cautious in the use of censure ; he should blame only where he is certain he sees a fault. There is a state of culpable indolence which, when the mind of the reviewer is empty, finds vent in some facile slur or sneer, and this is often set down and printed for no better

reason than that it has come into the reviewer's head. Often the critic, determined to be original and superior, says a disparaging thing of which he thinks or hopes he is sure, but of which he is not in the least sure. Even the precaution of certainty will be of no avail with some critics; having never experienced the presence of the quality, they cannot be conscious of the want of it. The old difference between those who know they are right and those who think they are right still remains, and this difference it is impossible to explain to the satisfaction of those who think they are right. The same difference exists among authors as well. There must be cases in which author and critic come to a dead-lock. The author thinks the critic a fool, and the critic thinks the author a fool. Sometimes the author is right, and sometimes the critic, and each must take the chances.

I say that critics should censure only

where they are sure. But authors have no right to quarrel with them for slighting what is good. It is inevitable that much that is good shall be overlooked. An author indeed cannot expect very precise justice at the hands of a newspaper critic. One came to me I remember once, and complained that I had written "coarsely" about an article of his in a magazine. By "coarse" he did not mean "vulgar;" he was much too clever a person to use a word in such an obvious sense. What he meant was that I had failed in a nice apprehension of his precise position. I had spoken of him as "opposing" such and such a view, when I should have used a word indicating a milder degree of antagonism. A proper answer to this was:— I had but an hour in which to review the magazine to which your article was but a single contribution. The thermometer was 95° in the shade. But you think I should have read the whole of your paper

carefully, should have reflected upon it until I had learned your exact intention, and then, should have spent an hour or two more looking through a volume of synonyms in search of epithets which should precisely describe it. I am also a writer for magazines, and I do not find that reviewers treat me in that way.

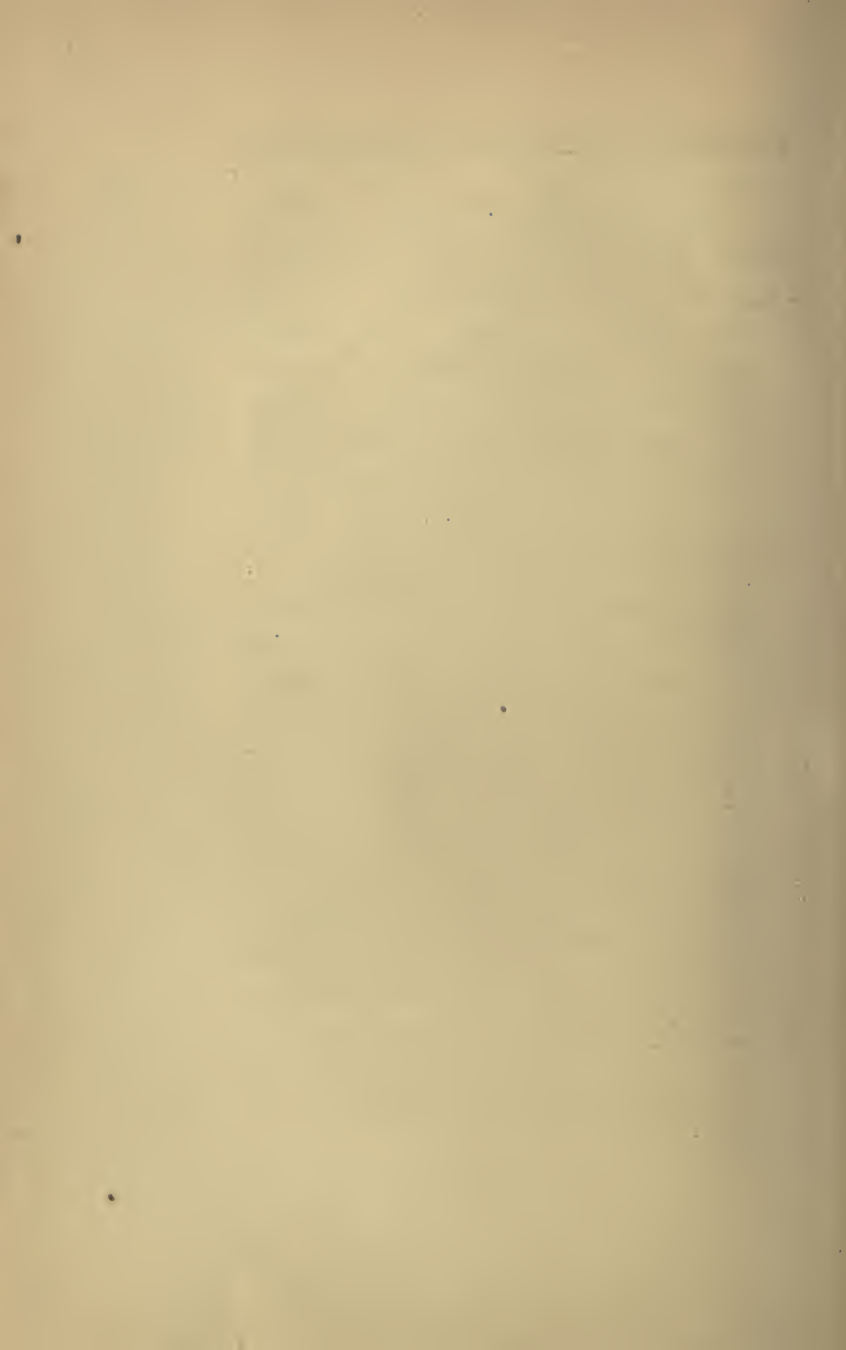
There is one inevitable difficulty of the newspaper literary critic. He writes about authors who are living, and whose feelings he is thus obliged to consult. Indeed, one must have been a newspaper reviewer in order to appreciate the great comfort of criticising authors who have departed. I am generally in favour of signed articles. But it must be admitted that a critic of books stands in a somewhat different position than a contributor upon political subjects. He is not in danger of giving such offence. The *amour propre* of politicians is not so intimately associated with their measures as that of authors is

with their books. But you do not get rid of the difficulty by making criticisms anonymous. If the author is the personal acquaintance of the reviewer, he is almost certain to know who his reviewer is. The reviewer cannot forget this, and he is tempted to ask the author not to be offended. He is very likely to address himself half to the reader and half to the author. He cannot help saying to himself as he writes, "How will he like this? Will he not hate me for that?" He is much freer when the author is not his friend or acquaintance. Just as the President cuts off the head of a subordinate a thousand miles away, with scarcely a thought that it is a real man whose head is coming off, and that to lose one's head is quite as painful in Colorado as in the district of Columbia, so the critic does not think it necessary to remember that for the author whose name on the title-page he has never before seen, there is somewhere walking about a



person of like feelings and affections with himself. But then authors and reviewers will know one another ; so I do not see how the difficulty is to be mended. Yet it sometimes happens that a man with peculiar gifts of taste, judgment, and sympathy, who is also a person interesting and attractive to the public, and well known to them, and whose position compels him to be the personal acquaintance of many authors,—I say it sometimes happens that such a critic may write with spirit and truth while at the same time dealing skilfully with the susceptibilities of the sensitive race which he has to judge. The public delights to converse with such a writer, and his name is of great use to authors themselves. *Laudari a viro laudato*—to be praised by a man of reputation and consideration—every author likes. Such a critic, however, should not be obliged to notice books which do not interest him.

There is another difficulty which the critic who wishes to be useful and successful may have to contend with. He may find himself in conflict with certain supposed commercial interests of the publications for which he writes. Where this difficulty exists, it is owing to the prevalence of a very short-sighted view as to the interest of these publications. This view is so obviously a mistake that I think it can only be accounted for as a matter of habit, and as a reminiscence of a day, not very far distant, when our great cities were little towns. It must in time cease to exist. But where this view is held, there can be no doubt that its existence is very weakning and hurtful to the newspaper critic, because it limits that first condition of his success—his liberty.



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